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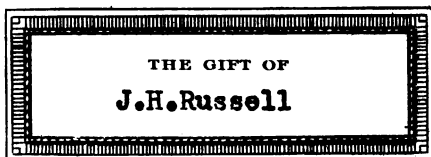
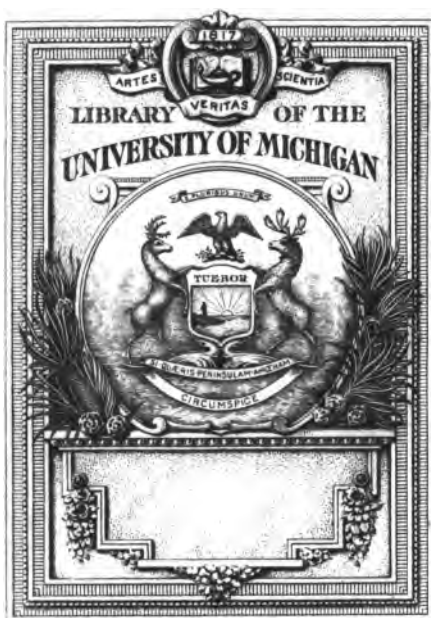
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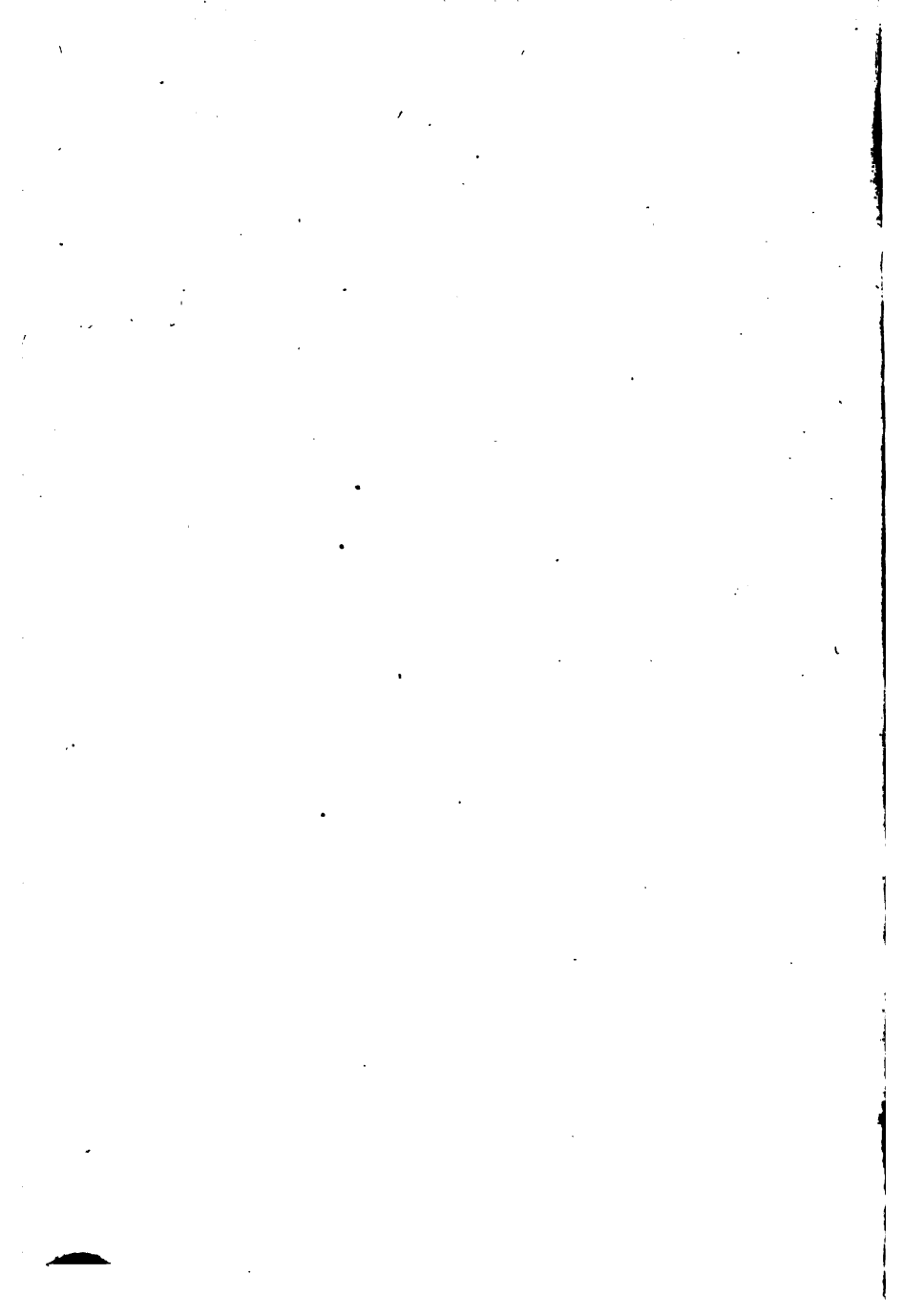
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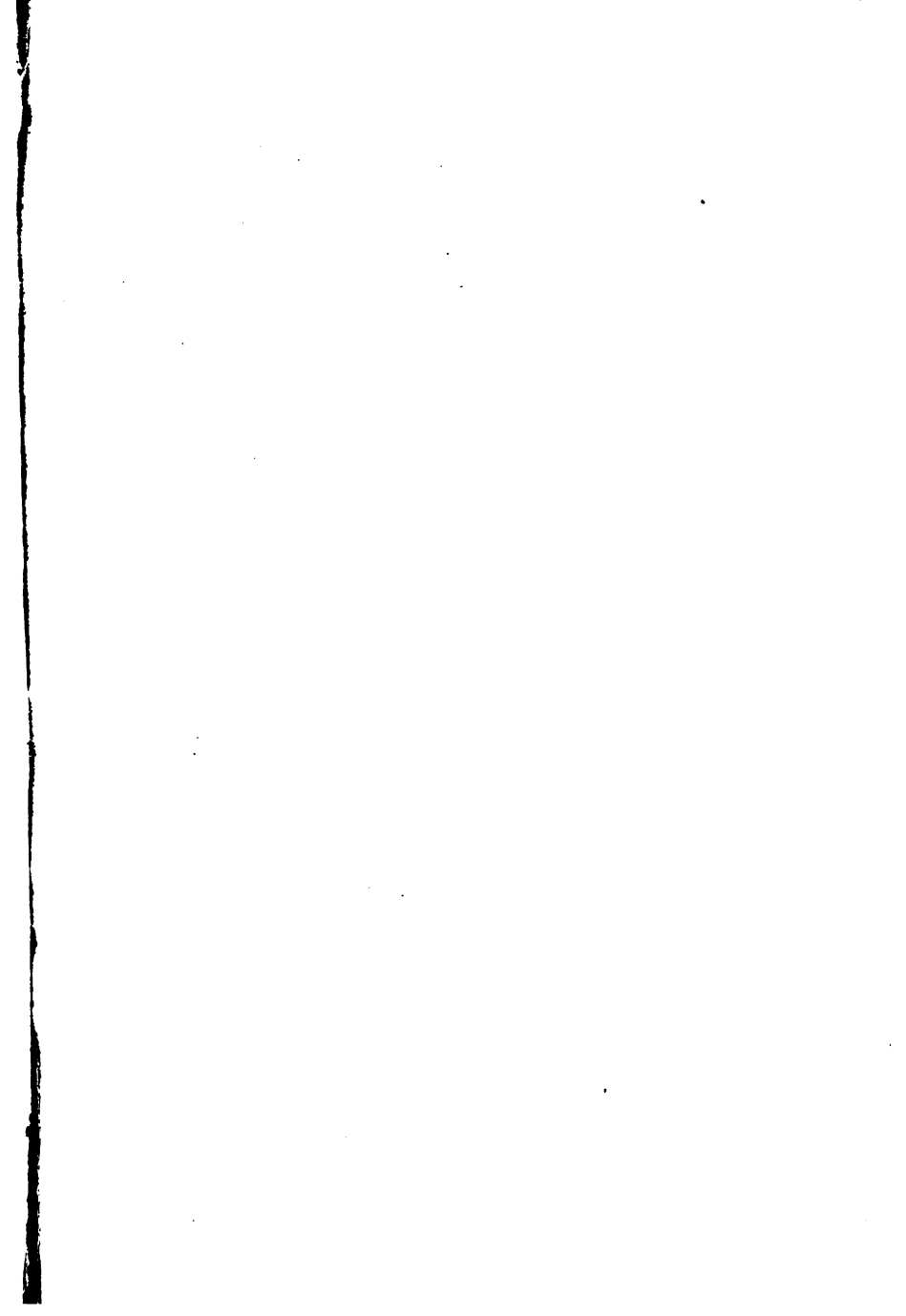
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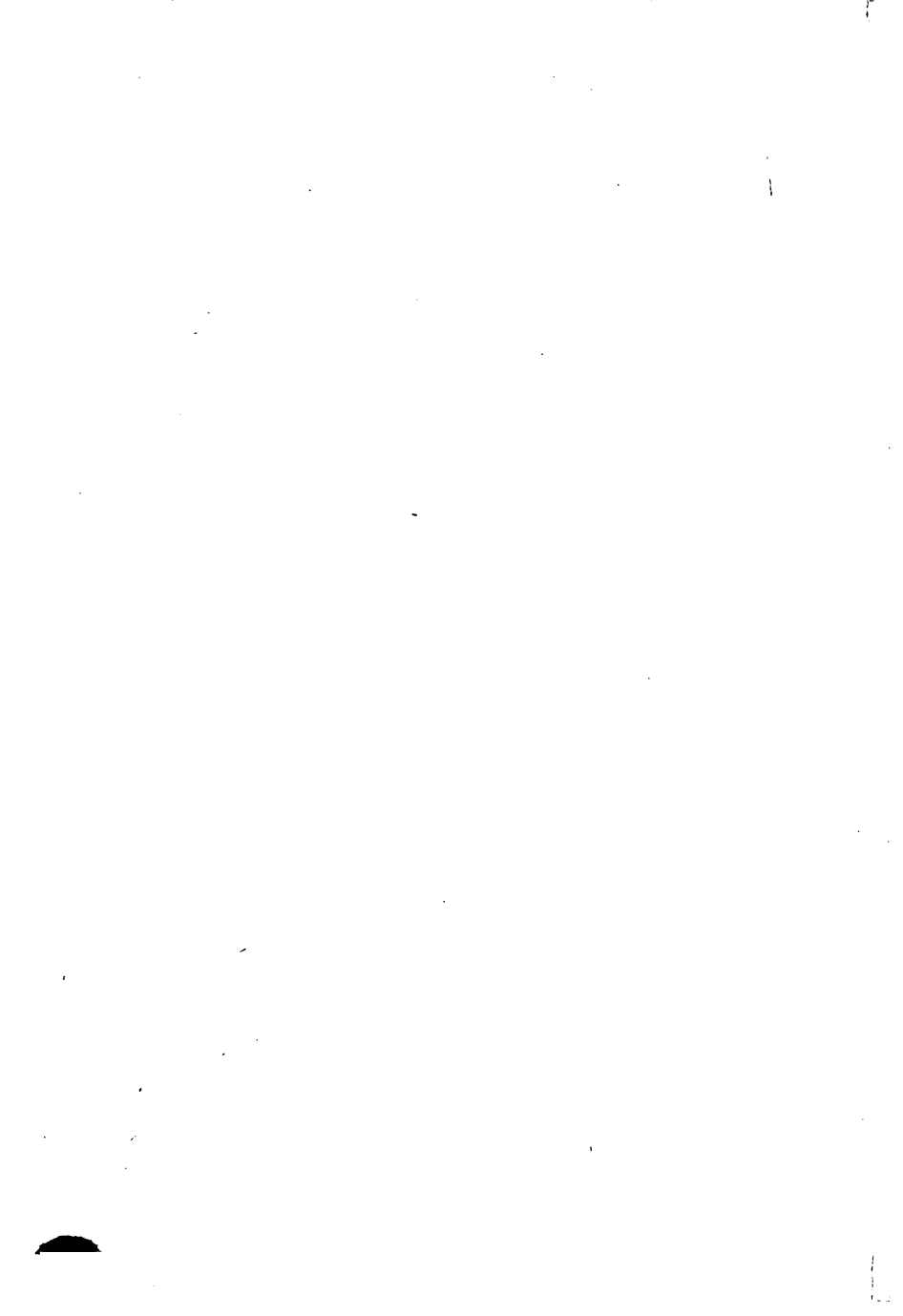
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# HINTS AND HELPS

ON THE

SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS,

1894.

BY

*REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D.,*

AND

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# HINTS AND HELPS.

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## THE FIRST ADAM.

GEN. I : 26-31; 2 : 1-3.

It is impossible for any thoughtful person to take up the study of the book of Genesis without profound feeling. To read these ancient words, simple and majestic beyond all others that have been conjoined in the history of speech, evokes the same kind of emotion (but raised to a higher power) which one has who gazes on *Magna Charta* or the age-darkened skull of Rameses II. Here speaks forth antiquity—"thou wondrous charm, which being nothing art everything!" Here is a voice which leaps to us across the long chasm of ages, in whose depths lie the wrecks of untold empires and races. As we read the words we seem to stand on the line which divides the time in which we live from the eternity which went before it. We look one way to see the crowded millions of earth busied about the successive cares of their brief lives. We look the other way into unlimited vastness, silent save for the awful voice which speaks from its depths evoking life. Such thoughts naturally come to us as we approach this solemn and noble story of the origin of things. We read it with even a deeper reverence than that which steals over our hearts when we go out at night to listen to the voice of God as it speaks to us in

"The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

To the student there is no more fascinating subject for study than this creation narrative. In one direction he can pursue the investigation of the relation between the story of origins as given here and as constructed independently, and more or less tentatively, by scientific archæologists. At once he is met by a vast controversial literature, acute, sometimes heated, always absorbingly interesting. In another direction also study may be pursued: on the subject of creation narratives as they are found among various peoples. Assyriology and ethnology have their genesis literature too, which one might easily spend years upon. Still again the study of the literature which has arisen around Genesis, as a literature, might be a worthy work for any scholar of bibliographical tastes. The character of the commentaries of successive ages, the shifting of the points of controversy, the progress of thought as assisted by discovery, offer a considerable field for an inductive study of the history of the human mind during the last fifteen hundred years.

But the purpose immediately before us is entirely practical. For the present this lesson is to be held before our thought in order that we may learn of man's origin, with the hope that this may tend to the uplifting of our moral and spiritual life.

From this point of view we are tempted to ask the preliminary question: "Why was this Genesis record written and why has it been providentially preserved?"

(a) We see from it the unity of history. There is infinite diversity among the races of men, and yet we are all one, as we learn from this story of our beginning. More than that, we are united also with the natural world to which we belong. Man is above nature, and he is also of it. These facts are important in connection with *the*

*history of redemption* which it is the purpose of the Scriptures to convey to us. Redemption came through a chosen race, but it was not for them alone but for all their brothers in the family of mankind (Gen. 12:3). Still more, redemption in some mysterious way affects the whole universe of which we are a part by God's creation (Isa. 65:17; Rom. 8:22; 2 Pet. 3:13).

(b) We learn that God is one, ruling material and spiritual things alike. When men's minds are occupied largely with natural science they tend to think of God chiefly as the God of nature, the one force which lies back of natural law. When their minds are occupied chiefly with moral and spiritual studies they tend to think chiefly of God as the fountain of obligation and the goal of human character. To the narrow scientist God has little to do with character. To the narrow spiritualist God has little to do with natural law. But from Genesis we learn that these partial conceptions of God are supplementary. The God of nature and the God of souls are one.

(c) God is supreme in everything. The natural world came from him; the spiritual world also came from him; and in neither has he abdicated his power. Natural law is wholly subordinate to him and he can do whatsoever he will. The spiritual world also is subject to him and his grace is omnipotent. It is right to pray for safety from the ocean storm, and for safety from sin. In all things, outward and inward, we may look to God for help.

Many a person who takes up the passage before us will spend all his time in dealing with the difficulties with which it bristles. But our aim is to get beyond these difficulties, which are like a fence to be passed, in order that we may feed in the spiritual pasture which lies beyond, and to which the fence-mounting is only prelimi-

nary. Accordingly we may put ourselves at a leap over the barrier and ask what the lessons of the section are.

1. Man is divine in his origin (v. 26). Nothing is said here of the way in which man came into being. All that we learn is that God purposed to make man and carried that purpose into effect. The most thoroughgoing Berkeleyan, refusing to believe in the existence of anything except his own thoughts of things, still cannot deny "*Cogito, ergo sum.*" "I" (whatever or whoever "I" is) "think; therefore I am." That I know. And the existence which I thus cogitate, whatever its character may be, came from God. There is no happening into existence. Nor could any boiling down of star mist into a material universe filled with the promise and potency of life come to a focus in me—who know that I am now thinking these thoughts—without the working of God. Back of me, both remote and near, I meet with the Eternal Cause, at work in making me. I am conscious of a certain personal isolation. The uniqueness and loneliness of the human soul must come to all of us at times. But we are never away from God, "in whom we live and move and have our being." I am conscious also that I can do many things as I please, that I have freedom of will. But that freedom does not undo the tremendous truth that it and the will to which it belongs are both the work of God, allegiance to whom can never be renounced. If as we lay in our cradle we could have looked up suddenly to actually see God working upon us to give us growth, would not our dependence upon him always seem vividly actual? It is just as actual though we have not corroborated it with the eyes. Whatever the processes may have been, let us never forget that in the most literal sense God made us.



2. Man is made like God (v. 27). Being made by God confers such distinction upon man as he ought never to be able to forget. But beyond that is the distinction of being made in the image of God. The former distinction man shares with the rest of the universe, but the latter is his alone. Animals, trees, rocks are worthy of a certain respect as being the handiwork of the Creator. But they are not like God. In what does man's God-likeness consist? Two words are used in the Hebrew, translated by *image* and *likeness* (v. 26). The fathers generally held that the former referred to the body, the latter to the soul. To-day it is more or less generally said that the two words are synonymous and the repetition is only a Hebrew method of emphasis, and the likeness is restricted to the moral nature. But the Scripture does not say that man's likeness to God was only in soul. The whole man, body and soul, was made God-like. What does that mean? Not of course that God has a body, or looks like a man, but that the inner likeness is adequately set forth in the external embodiment. Perhaps we might conjecture that if God should embody himself for us it would be in a glorified resemblance to human lineaments. These are fit presentments of a divine character back of them, and such an inference is startlingly strengthened by remembering what God was like in the theophanies and the incarnation. However, the moral part of man's God-likeness is the chief thing, and in what did this consist? Brushing aside a host of speculations we may feel that it is reasonable (with Delitzsch) to say "in his being a creature who has mastery over himself (self-conscious and self-determining)." Whatever thought is, we know that we are conscious of our own existence. Whatever the freedom of the will may be, we know that we have

something which we try to set forth by that term. The two, self-consciousness and will, are necessary to moral life. A being unconscious of self, therefore unconscious of obligation, might be good, but its goodness would not have moral quality: the "oughtness" of it would not be evident. Such a being would be good without any delight in duty done. Again, a being without freedom of will might be good, but only because it could not help it, not because of choice. Such goodness would not have ethical quality. Man was made with the capacity to appreciate goodness as being what is right, and to love it for its rightness. And he was made with the ability to follow out that appreciation with an act of the will, choosing goodness to be his own for the love of it. And in these things he was like God, who loves holiness wherever he sees it, and who eternally chooses it and acts it out in invincible freedom. Well might man look down on the beasts about him (although God saw that they were "good;" i. e., perfect according to his pattern for them). They could not know whether they liked being what they were or not; they could not choose to be other than what they were. But man could appreciate goodness and so enjoy being good himself, and could exult in the thought that this was what he wanted to be and chose to remain. What must be the supreme felicity of a pure heart willing actively to keep pure! Something of this kind must have been part of the deep peace of the heart of our blessed Saviour.

3. Man takes his place in the scale of existence (v. 27). On the one side he takes part in the lot of God. On the other side, by being subordinate to the same mysterious laws of life which hold over plants and animals he is linked with the world about him. "Male and female

created he them." Dualism teaches that matter is all evil, the body inherently sinful, and the soul the only good part of man. Out of this comes asceticism, which treats the body slightly, prohibiting food as largely as possible, despising marriage, expressing the condemnation of this habitation of the soul in wearying fasts and horrible flagellations. But the body is God's work, it is holy, it is honored by God in the institution of marriage, it is called the temple of the Holy Ghost. As often as we think of it we may remind ourselves that through it we form a part of the great universe about us, so wonderfully testifying to the creative power of God (Psalm 139: 14); and at the same time we may remember that by being more than body we are above the world about us, good as it is, and have an infinitely lofty spiritual destiny.

4. Man thus made was blessed of God (v. 28). That blessing must have contained a multitude of good intentions. The first beings God blessed were the inhabitants of water and air (1: 22). He thus "consecrated them to fertility" (Lange) and provided for the filling of the earth. And yet the plants had not been so blessed (1: 12). Perhaps "this uttered blessing exhibits God's greater pleasure in the higher forms of animal life and in creatures which can enjoy conscious happiness" (Dods). At any rate the thought is that God meant to cause them to prosper (Gesenius). The thriving conveyed thus to animals was also conveyed to man, and we may also believe a higher thriving, in the things of the soul. God meant to bestow upon man all good, earthly and heavenly. And whereas man's blessing is only a wish, a prayer that blessing may come, God's blessing is efficient. What he wishes for is. Man was blessed, and was to be blessed more and more as time went on.

5. God provided for man's needs (v. 29). Food was there for the body and he need never want. Without trouble, without anxious struggle, without wrong, man was to have everything needful for himself. "The painlessness and bloodlessness and peace of the ideal world (Isa. 11: 6-9) is viewed as an essential of the primitive world as it came from the hand of God" (Dods). In these days, when we have learned that life is maintained only by a struggle for existence, the far-away Adamic time seems very unreal. Perhaps it is made more unreal by our knowledge of the inexorable natural law which we have discovered to be in force. Probably, yes, undoubtedly, our abandonment to that law is more complete than is necessary. We think there must be struggle and so we struggle the more fiercely. But it is interesting to note that Christ's teachings are in sympathy with man's earliest state. He tells us to have no anxious care for the morrow, and to pray only for bread for one day ahead. He urges us to trust in the same love which was over Adam, which, if it cares for the sparrow, will care for us. And it is interesting to remember that the early Christians did accept these sayings of Christ fully, and lived in complete faith that God would literally supply all their wants (Wendt). Sin has made a difference in many ways, and we cannot always infer, as we read Genesis, from what was to what is. But we are safe in reminding ourselves that, under changed conditions, God still provides for our needs, and always will provide.

6. God approved of man as he looked upon him after his creation (v. 31). The whole creation, man included, was pronounced "very good," man was faultless as an unrelated individual, and he was faultless also in his equipment for a splendid career in history. He was like

a fine engine just leaving the shops, which is not only complete *per se*, but completely provided with fuel, water, and men to carry it through a successful journey. We do not wonder that the Creator uttered this emphatic phrase of satisfaction as he beheld man newly made. All the works of his hands are wonderful, but man surpasses them all. The commonest stone is full of things admirable. Much above that in interest is the plant, endowed with the mystery we call life. Marvellous above this is the animal, rich in extraordinary functions and instincts. But towering high above all stands man, truly the king of creation by virtue of his spiritual being.

7. To supply his wants spiritually (the wants of the body having already been provided for) God gave him the Sabbath, which should be a help, all through history, to his soul's uplifting (2:3). "The divine blessing endowed the seventh day with a treasure of grace flowing forth from the rest of the Creator, which is opened for those who keep it, and the divine hallowing removed it from among the week days and invested it with a special and distinguishing consecration." (Delitzsch).

As we think of man as he came thus from the hand of the Creator, with every want, bodily and spiritual, provided for, and think of him as he is now, we are tempted to exclaim "*Quantum mutatus ab illo!*" But that will come later. For the present let us carry in mind only man as he was made by God, splendid with a moral glory of which we can only dream.

## ADAM'S SIN AND GOD'S GRACE.

GEN. 3:1-15.

THE two most conspicuous elements common to all the human race are life and sin. We have studied the origin of one: we are now to look at the origin of the other. And what a panorama unfolds itself before our saddened eyes as we stand beside the shame-faced culprits of Eden and look out over the ages of history, all darkened by sin! There, near the gates guarded by the cherubim, lies the prostrate form of Abel, slain by a brother's hand. Yonder are the debased sons of the patriarchs, there the adulterous and idolatrous children of the wandering, the luxurious and immoral rulers of the two kingdoms. We turn to Greece to hear the multitude laughing over the obscenities of Aristophanes; we enter with the Roman multitude into the Coliseum to behold brothers cast to the lions; we see the ruthless cruelty of Huns, Teutons, Celts and Slavs; we see mediæval Europe amusing itself with Jew-baiting; there is Catharine de' Medici, yonder Henry the Eighth, there Catharine of Russia; we hide our heads in shame as we recall "the Virgin tribute of modern England"; we lay down our daily newspaper, sick at heart over its record of civilized crime. What a vision is the "Vision of Sin:!"

"Sit thee down, and have no shame,  
Cheek by jowl, and knee by knee;  
What care I for any name?  
What for order or degree?"

"Fill the cup, and fill the can :  
Have a rouse before the morn :  
Every moment dies a man,  
Every moment one is born."

Looking at the first sin in the light of its consequences we do not wonder that Milton fancied that

"Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat  
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe  
That all was lost."

Some special considerations meet us as we address ourselves to the Bible narrative of the first sin.

1. From widely separated sources we are confronted with parallels more or less exact, more or less mythologically elaborated. We see this episode at least suggested by Chaldæan traditions, in Zoroastrianism, and in the Scandinavian Eddas. Yet the parallels to this are not nearly as numerous as those which connect themselves with the Edenic felicity, the serpent, and the tree of life. These are found in a multitude of forms, but the fall in only a few. Why this difference? Lenormant says: "Of all primitive traditions concerned with the infancy of humanity this one it is which is most quickly forgotten. The truth of the Fall and of the original taint is one against which human pride is most prone to revolt, that which it first attempts to put aside."

2. There are many estimates of the character of the narrative. Skeptical minds consider it a myth: verbalists hold that every word is to be taken literally. The body of Christian commentators hold with Lange that it is "a historical fact to be taken in a religious ideal or symbolical form." "That sin began with the beginning of the race, that the first sin had its origin in a forbidden enjoyment of nature, . . . that the origin of human sin points

back to the beginning of the human race, . . . that along with sin came in the tendency to sin, consciousness of guilt, alienation from God, and evil in general—all these are affirmations of the religious historical consciousness which demand the historicalness of our tradition, and would point back to some such fact even though it were not written in Genesis." We are always to remember then that we are here in the presence, not of myth, but of history.

3. The meaning of Christianity is bound up with the fall of Adam. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The one correlate presupposes the other. The uplifting points back to a downfall. "So Genesis makes the book of Revelation possible, and lays the foundation for the rapturous vision of 'a statelier Eden' and a pure humanity" (Maclaren).

The narrative gives us the history of the first sin, from which all other sins come, which all reproduce the same process of development.

4. The source of sin is pointed out. It was not in man himself, for he was made with all desires and inclinations holy, but in an evil element outside him. The personality and characteristics of Satan are increasingly revealed as we advance through the Scriptures, and we can see, what was invisible to our first parents, the malignant badness of the great antagonist of souls, who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The great problem of the origin of evil in general is not explained for us in the Scriptures. How Satan came to sin we do not know and cannot understand. The first entrance of sin into the world of spirits (which we find already in existence when the imposing spectacle of creation opens) is forever to us a mystery. The universe was cer-



tainly once all good (for we cannot for a moment accept that dualism which would give to evil an eternal existence). Why the omnipotent God allowed sin to rise up within it he keeps in his own holy counsel. How evil could have started when all was good we can no more imagine than we can conceive of a motionless body giving itself a push. All we know is that here is evil, and yonder is God, and both are real and must be recognized. The book of Genesis was written for practical ends, and gives us the history but not the philosophy of sin's beginning on earth.

The means used in man's downfall were part of God's good creation environing him. The serpent and the apple were not sinful in themselves, but by special relations took on harmful possibilities. "The object of the temptation was found in the vegetable, the tempter came from the animal world" (Delitzsch). Even good things have in them the power of leading man astray, if he looks at them in a wrong way. Food may tempt to intemperance, the body made to be the temple of God may be the friend of lust, the mind may be full of pride, worship may be spectacular frivolity, and even prayer an abomination to God. Anything can be misused, and so anything can become a temptation to sin. And yet man's environment was not at fault. He was at fault for the wrong way in which he was led to view it and act towards it.

## 2. The accomplishment of sin.

The first step is the appearance of temptation within the area of the soul's life (v. 1). The evil one propounds a question to the woman. So far she was not responsible, any more than our Lord was responsible for being tempted in the wilderness. The course of events always must be offering the possibility of sin to man. For temptation is

the means of moral growth, and so it was permitted to come to Eve. If she had resisted it she would have been a step farther on in the spiritual life. Man was made good, but he was meant to grow, and resistance to evil was to be part of the method. Eve therefore was not responsible for this question having been put to her. When she heard it she had not yet sinned, but the possibility of sin had begun.

In Eve's answer we are probably warranted in discovering a beginning of sin already. The evil one's remark to her was put insidiously in the form of a question. There is here no statement against God (that might have shocked Eve into flight) but only an insinuation of mistrust. Did not Eve do wrong in parleying about such a subject at all? She must have recognized the doubt of God raised ever so slightly in the query put to her. Why did she not turn from it in silence; why not turn her thoughts towards God, who would have answered any slightest puzzled inarticulate wish for help? She listened to the insinuation, and that was the beginning of woe. For the moment she attended to it it seemed worthy of refutation. She repels the untruth contained in the question (v. 3), and yet even in her denial witnesses to the settlement of doubt upon her heart. For she did not repeat God's prohibition as he made it, but added to it "neither shall ye touch it," and proved by this very exaggeration that it appeared too stringent even to her, and therefore that her love and confidence towards God were already beginning to waver (Keil).

The tempter having secured a hearing, and thus won his first point, loses no time in taking advantage of his opportunity. With the utmost daring he asserts a lie, so expressed that it shall precisely contradict the utterance

of God (v. 4). But, lest the downright conflict of authority thus inaugurated should seem unwarranted on his part, he alleges a reason (false of course) why God should have prohibited the eating of one tree's fruit (v. 5). His attack thus gains strength from both possible methods: it is bold and downright, and at the same time speciously reasonable. In his first utterance there is no pretence of sympathy with God. The gauntlet is thrown down. It is admitted that there is absolute difference between him and God. War is apparent, in that God's veracity is impeached without any mincing of words. Why did this not open Eve's eyes? Satan had chosen his plan of warfare well, for sometimes it is just the boldness, the unexpected strength of the temptation to sin, which captures us. Yet sin, however bold, must follow up its boldness with some attempt at self-justification. If Satan was shrewd in making a bold assault as soon as he had won the opportunity, no less shrewd was he in fortifying his new position argumentatively. Concerning this second and rationalistic element in his attack, we may notice (*a*) that there was a basis of truth in this statement brought out to fortify the daring lie which had gone before. It was true that if Adam and Eve ate of this fruit they should "be as gods, knowing good and evil." It was also true that God knew this. (*b*) Yet the truth was most amazingly and deftly perverted. For if by eating the fruit Adam and Eve came to know good and evil, this knowledge, which God meant to give them any way, through their obedience to him, and which would be thus a source of blessing to them, would by their sinful method of obtaining it be changed into a curse. The untruth implied in Satan's words was that Adam and Eve would never have this knowledge except by eating the fruit, and also that after

they had it (no matter by what method) they would be as gods—in felicity. No more deceitful interweaving of truth and falsehood could be imagined. (c) The first lie impeached God's truthfulness; the second lie attempted the more difficult feat (prepared for, however, by the utterance of the first lie) of impeaching God's love. Satan implied that God was withholding from Adam and Eve something immensely desirable, which showed that he did not love them as much as they had thought. (d) An appeal is here made for the first time to human vanity. How proud Adam and Eve would feel when, instead of being conscious of ignorance about nearly everything, they could look God in the face and say, however falsely, "Now we know as much as you!"

The next step in Eve's sin was her assenting to what Satan said in so far as to look with longing upon the forbidden fruit (v. 6). The things which she dreamed she saw in it were undoubtedly there, but they were not meant for her in connection with the fruit. It was doubtless good for food, but other fruit-trees had been set apart for that purpose; it was doubtless pleasant to the eyes, but the garden was full of legitimate pleasures; doubtless it was "to be desired to make one wise," but wisdom was meant to come in a better way. But these things did not occur to her. She was listening to temptation, and when one is doing that reason's voice is but little heard. "Our great security against sin consists in our being shocked at it. Eve gazed and reflected when she should have fled" (Newman).

The preparation for sin is long and involved. One fortification after another must be captured before the citadel is reached. But at last comes the one assault by which that falls. Though the preparations for sin may

have been long to tediousness, the act of sin itself is quickly accomplished. To lose Eden is a briefer matter than the getting ready to lose it. "She took of the fruit thereof and did eat." It was the slipping of a latch but an inch, but it gave over the fortress of human life to the tyranny of innumerable wrongs. It was only the eating of an apple; but hell came in the moment the deed was done.

And yet sin is not complete until it has led love to wrong its own. "She gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." As sin spread from Satan to Eve, so now it spreads from Eve to Adam, revealing the never-demitted tendency to self-propagation. Before it, love heavenward or love manward is but a barrier of straw. The noblest relationship of earth becomes the apparatus of Satan's malignant purposes.

3. The result of sin. Their eyes were opened (v. 7), they did know good and evil; but they knew something which Satan had not mentioned: they knew that they were naked.

The consequence was immediate. Sin was prepared for deliberately, like the placing of a series of mines with the connecting electric wires; but once the circuit is made effect follows effect rapidly and convulsively.

The deceitfulness of sin was apparent now, for this forms part of the knowledge of good and evil which had been coveted, and promised, and now secured. But this insight into sin's deceitfulness came too late to be of use. It was a kind of information which could only tend to the multiplication of self-accusations.

The discovery of nakedness suggests many a line of subtle questioning. But this much is plain, that it involves the consciousness of guilt. That is the point

which stands prominently before us as we contemplate that melancholy pair. They knew what sin was, they knew what it was to be the author of sin, they knew what the defilement of that responsibility was.

Next they shunned their best friend (v. 8). What sort of felicitous communion they may have enjoyed with God we do not know, but it was ended now. They did not wish to meet him. Conscious of unholiness, they knew that they were alienated from him who is infinitely holy.

Next they add sin to sin; they resort to subterfuge to explain their avoidance of God (v. 10). It was true that they were naked, it was true that they hid from God. But it was untrue that one was the cause of the other. Sin was the cause of the avoidance, and nakedness was only a pretext.

Next, in this rapid succession of effects, comes the attempt to shirk responsibility (vs. 12, 13). The man charged his offence to the woman, and at the same time had the audacity to suggest that God himself was partly to blame, for he gave the woman to Adam. The woman on her part pointed to the serpent. Here again truth was at the foundation of the allegations, but the vital point was passed by unmentioned: that even if one is tempted by another he is no less responsible for yielding and committing sin.

The concluding disaster speedily ensues, in the pronouncement of the curse (vv. 14-19). Upon all who took part in the transaction God's solemn words of condemnation fall. Sin, beginning only in a question, has now reached its consummation in the sentence of death. The length and breadth and depth of its awfulness are now disclosed.

Yet, at this moment of man's doom, behold the love of God! Over these heavy storm-clouds that have settled upon man's fair sky there darts a ray of sunlight from the face of the eternal Father, and, like a rainbow, we behold God's illumining grace.

Although man has sinned against God, God loves him still, plans to extricate him from his sins, and reveals the fact that the escape shall some day be accomplished. A promise is made of never-remitted conflict between Satan and man (Dillmann). But that would not be very encouraging unless the outcome were known. So within this promise there is implied the further pledge that the conflict shall end in man's triumph (Delitzsch). Sin has conquered for the present, but goodness shall have its grander day of conquest at last. How this is to be brought about is not revealed. But looking back to Eden from Calvary we see that this early promise, purposely made vague, is definitely fulfilled in Christ's triumph over sin and death.

We must note the earliness of this first gospel. No sooner has man sinned than God comes to his help with this cheering message.

We must note also its graciousness. Man had violated his obligations to God; he had forfeited all privileges; the only thing he could demand of God as his right thenceforth was punishment for his sins. Yet God did not treat him according to his deserts, but graciously arranged an escape for him, so that sin might be punished and man still live in the favor of God. And God was doubly gracious—for making such a plan, and for revealing it so soon. Oh, the wonderful riches of his love to disobedient man!

## CAIN AND ABEL.

GEN. 4 : 3-13.

THE story of creation begins with the bursting forth of light. In this primeval glory we see man moving, glad with the joy of Paradise. Too soon a shadow creeps over that brightness. Sin enters, and the sky of human life is darkened with storm-laden clouds. And no sooner has darkness begun than it deepens with terrifying rapidity. The next step away from holiness plunges man in the most horrible depth of sin. The meaning of the eating of the forbidden fruit becomes plain when we see murder as its near consequence.

The story of this second sin opens, like the narrative of the first and of many another sin, with an exquisite scene. Here are two brothers, the first of all the human race to know the sweet meaning of the word, going out to sacrifice. The romance of this first tableau in the story of human brotherhood is most striking. What could be more appropriate and beautiful than that, at their first appearance before us, these brothers should be engaged in the act of worship? Here we seem to see the promise of companionship in everything good. Each had his special occupation, one being a keeper of sheep and the other a tiller of the ground. It cannot be said that one was superior to the other in this respect. Doubtless each had been providentially led in choosing his work. Out of this difference of occupation grew a natural difference in the character of their sacrifices. Cain brought fruits because he was engaged with them, Abel brought animal sacrifices because he was a herder. Many commentators



have seen a distinction arising already between the men in the character of their offerings, supposing that Abel's was better because it was penitential—an animal sacrifice, belonging to what afterwards was the most important class of offerings. This, if true, would well explain the occurrence, and show that from the first the need of repentance and atonement was recognized by the human heart. But on the other hand it would seem natural and right on the part of Cain to offer what he had. It was not sinful to till the ground rather than to keep flocks, for all work is good when done in the right spirit.

By other writers the unacceptability of Cain's offering has been charged to its inferior character: Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof, the best of what he had; but it is not said that Cain brought of the first fruits of the ground. But again the distinction is doubtful. Cain may have brought the best he had for aught we know. The record is not so emphatic on the point as to warrant us in finding the ground of God's approval of one brother and disapproval of the other in the difference of quality of their respective offerings. We may suppose that each brought the very best he had, and that so far as the offerings themselves were concerned both were pleasing to God, and still find more than sufficient reason for his acceptance of one and rejection of the other.

That reason lay in the character of the men themselves. It is true some have tried to find it in some antecedent and undescribed conduct of Cain. They see in the statement "if thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (v. 7) an implication that because Cain was not accepted some doing of ill had gone before (Dods, MacLaren). But the word "accepted" here probably means

something else than what it seems to mean, as we shall see, so this inference falls to the ground. Why then did God accept one offering and refuse the other, if not for any difference in the character of the things offered or in the past character of the offerers? One had a good heart, and the other had a bad heart. "It is not the gifts themselves in their externalism, but the inward disposition of the persons therein manifested, which determines the conduct of God" (Delitzsch.) This is not an inference which we make, but it is the authoritative interpretation given to us in Heb. 11:4. There we learn that "by faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." There was a great difference between the inner character of these two brothers, one being righteous of heart and the other unrighteous. As a result, one in bringing an offering to God did it with that quality of soul called faith, which was wanting in the other. By faith we mean not merely a belief in the existence of God, for Cain had that, but filial, trustful love towards him. Abel was accepted because "the worshipper put his heart, as it were, into the gift" (Oehler).

Cain thereupon was very wroth (v. 5). With whom was he angry? With his brother and with God. If he had any feeling of disapproval to vent, certainly it should have been towards himself, for the cause of God's disapproval was not in God nor in Abel, but in Cain himself. But sin is not only folly in itself, but, as Proverbs teaches us, it makes the sinner a fool in everything. Cain did not think wisely in allowing his anger to have a target outside his own unrighteous soul. He was unreasonable. God was not unjust or unkind; Abel was not unbrotherly. Yet Cain was wroth with them.

That he may not sin ignorantly Cain now receives a warning (vs. 6-7). God speaks. He points out to Cain that he is angry—he might not have thought of it otherwise. He puts a question to him calculated to bring to view the unreasonableness of the anger. Then he calls attention to the difference in consequences between having a good and having an evil heart (v. 7). "If thou doest well," he says, "that is, if thou art righteous, and hast a good heart, is there not 'uplifting'?" By "uplifting" is meant *elatio*, "courage, which is reflected in a cheerful, willingly raised countenance" (Delitzsch), or "a quiet conscience" (Brown). "If thou doest well" may easily refer to a state of heart. It "may be equally said of inward good disposition as of external good action. That Cain was angry with his brother because of the favorable reception of his offering was the point in which he did evil, and this secret evil-doing, known only to God, predisposed him to an external open act of sin" (Delitzsch). This leads on to the second alternative. "If thou doest not well [in thy heart] sin lieth at the door [like a wild beast waiting for thee to emerge]; and unto thee shall be its desire [to catch and ruin thee] but thou shouldst rule over it." God's purpose in thus talking to Cain is to say to him, in effect, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil" (Ps. 37:8). And to impress this He reveals to him, substantially, what Peter wrote to his friends, that "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The alternative of consequence between the good heart and the evil heart is plainly set forth. To have right desires—not such as anger leads to—is to have elation of heart, strength to do right, a good conscience. To have evil desires is to be

like a man at whose door a ravenous wild beast lies, for as the evil-hearted man goes out into the world temptation waits to attack him, and to lead him to transform his evil thought into an open crime. Yet God goes beyond this, and warns Cain that even if he is conscious of evil desires he need not transform them into crimes, for while temptation would lead him on to that result, it is his duty "to rule over it." A bad thought is bad enough, but he who is conscious of having it should struggle to prevent its incarnation in a bad deed. Cain was thus doubly warned; against having evil thoughts, and against putting those thoughts into action.

But the warning was useless. Right in the face of it "Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" (v. 8). There is no attempt made to explain the horridness of this first crime in the annals of earth's woe. There is no heaping up of adjectives here such as we are tempted to make in order to paint the heinousness of the deed more vividly. Just as the splendor of God's first creative act is set forth most magnificently in the severely simple words "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light," so the infamy of Cain's sin is made the more terrible by the unadorned record: "And Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." It took little expense of time or struggle to bring in this great woe, and it takes few words to tell of it.

No sooner is the sin committed than the voice of God sounds again—this time not to assist against sin, but to condemn for sin. A point has been passed which has altered God's relation to Cain entirely. No longer can Cain meet God frankly; he must resort to sophistry and deceit. First he tells a bare lie, "I know not" (v. 9); for the second time letting an evil thought escape and em-

body itself in outward sin, attempting (in the universal folly of sin) the impossible, i. e., to deceive God. To fortify this bold endeavor, and make it seem less audacious and shocking, Cain resorts next to sophistry; he attempts to evade responsibility in the circumstances by breaking down the eternal law of obligation to brotherly love (again foolishly essaying the impossible): "Am I my brother's keeper?" How is it that man, weak, dependent, dares thus to utter an insinuation against the justice of the relation in which God sets man with respect to his fellow? Sin alone could give man such a brazen face.

But crime will out. God does not say, as he might have said, that by virtue of omniscience he was aware of Cain's deed, but he points to the fact (which man overlooks) that sin, which disturbs the whole order of existence, cannot be hidden, for that reason. The slightest vibration of a vessel containing a certain solution causes it to crystallize. There may be no witness of the act, but it has witness enough in the crystals which result. Man's single sin penetrates through the whole body politic, and relations of every sort are changed by it. It is futile for him to imagine that his committal of it can be concealed. Cain had not thought of it, but there was the ground stained with his brother's blood. Nature was a dumb witness to his crime.

Penalty soon follows sin. God at once pronounced the curse upon Cain. He was to be an exile from that place (v. 11); he was to be a failure in his chosen occupation; and he was as a consequence to be "a fugitive and a vagabond," always seeking what he could never find (v. 12).

Too late a semblance of right feeling arises in Cain's heart (v. 35). He feels the pressure of "the idea of the

sin, the burden of which weighs down and crushes him who has committed it with the weight of moral remorse and of the material punishment to which it exposes him even in this life" (Lenormant.) He knows what guilt means, he dreads the just retribution which impends over it. But he has accepted sin with full knowledge and full warning, and the feeling of shrinking which he has now, which might have been useful not long before, comes now too late. The deed is done, Abel is dead, and the consequences of sin must be borne.

Certain general considerations come to us as we meditate upon the sad spectacle of Abel dead.

1. We see that sin is bound to grow.

It grows numerically. In the case of Adam and Eve we saw that when once an evil feeling was allowed to remain in the heart it speedily gathered other evil feelings unto itself, which at last burst forth in the full-blown sin of deed; and that this in turn gathered other sinful deeds unto itself; and now we see these developing in the next generation, first appearing, after the same manner, in evil feelings, which collect, develop into evil deeds which again collect, and so the series goes on indefinitely. Sin of heart, sin of act; sin of heart, sin of act; so it goes on and on through the years, the centuries, the æons of human life. Once the upas tree is allowed to shoot upward from the earth it is only a matter of time when its dark branches shall overshadow all mankind.

Moreover, as we compare the sin of Adam and the sin of Cain, we see that evil has grown in intensity. The quality of Adam's sin was bad enough, but that of Cain's was worse. Adam's sin had its origin in foolish pride; the thought of becoming god-like in obtaining a certain kind of mysterious knowledge hitherto withheld appealed

to man's vanity. Cain's sin had a deadlier root: it arose in envy, which grew into hatred. The actual overt sin of Adam was also less terrible than that of Cain. Adam gratified a harmless bodily appetite in an illegitimate way by eating the forbidden fruit; but Cain let loose a passion, never in any form worthy, in a deed of outrageous violence.

Again we see growth as we compare the after-sins of Adam and Cain. After eating the fruit Adam tried to conceal the fact from God and evaded his question. But Cain uttered a downright lie to his Creator. Sin had become more unscrupulous, brazenly daring, thoughtless of consequences. Growth is everywhere and always a law of its being. It does not rest undeveloped. It is always striving to become larger and more sinful.

2. Certain things connected with Cain's act impress upon us anew the awfulness of sin.

Under what circumstances did Cain's sinful emotions arise? Was there some powerful stimulus from without to some raging appetite within? Were circumstances such that, speaking humanly, he could not help sinning? Was there an overwhelming onslaught of external forces upon him? No, it was in the peace-bringing act of worship that the base emotions of his soul arose. Circumstances were unfavorable to sin. God was near; it was a season appropriate for the outflowing of brotherly love; it was a time for the development of all high and noble emotions. Yet that hour, the least likely of all for such a result, saw the basest desire, freighted with the potency of the basest deed, rising in the evil heart of Cain.

The sense of brotherhood, given to these two men first of all the human race, unweakened by the countless assaults made upon it in the ages since, was unable to

restrain Cain's fierce trend to sin. Emphasis on this sense of brotherhood seems to be made in the Scripture by the repetition of the hallowed word brother six times in four verses (vs. 8-11). Thereby we have impressed upon us the headstrong baseness of his crime.

The power of sin is forcibly revealed in the Lord's description of it as a wild beast lurking at the door, waiting for man's destruction. What figure could be stronger? And yet Cain did not believe it, or, believing it, did not care. So reckless of consequence is the soul determined to sin.

3. With Cain and Abel there began a new phenomenon in human history: the division of men into two classes, good and evil. All are alike sinners in the eyes of a holy God, but some are vastly greater sinners than others, and relatively to one another men are properly divided into good and evil. On the one hand stands Abel, serving God with a consecrated heart, on the other stands Cain, finding in the most holy things means of sin. And with one of those two every one of us has his place.



## GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH.

GEN. 9 : 8-17.

SIN, which made its entrance into the world in Adam, which touched so low a depth in the crime of Cain, reached the nadir in the days of Noah. Then the earth, which God had made and pronounced very good, was so steeped in evil that an all but annihilating catastrophe was sent by God to overwhelm it. He might have made the destruction final if he had chosen. He might have made an entirely new world. But that would not have been this world, in which the promise made to Eve was yet to be accomplished. Sinful as the world was, and that too so soon after its creation, God did not despair of it; he did not utterly crush out mankind; for he saw the time coming when the earth should be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11 : 9). Who but a gracious and loving God would have had such faith in degenerate man? Who but he would have withheld his hand from complete destruction? Because of the breadth and depth of sin which God saw in man he swept the race from the globe—and yet not entirely, because of the glory which he saw was still possible for man through grace.

As we behold Adam walking in the new paradise, so we see Noah coming out of the ark into what is practically a new world. Old things are done away. Civilization is to begin over again. And, kind as God was to man newly created, his kindness seems even more striking to man starting out again to live. For with Noah God makes

a covenant. The word occurs for the first time in Gen. 6: 18, where it refers to God's promise to keep Noah, and those with him in the ark, safely. That seems an anticipation of the fuller and more far-reaching covenant of Gen. 9: 9. Both refer to the preservation of life, the former by God's keeping the ark in safety, the latter by his refraining from sending a second deluge.

The word covenant has a double sense. When a covenant is made between equals it means a mutual agreement; when it is made by a superior to an inferior it means a promise (sometimes conditional on certain things in the inferior) determined in its terms wholly by the one party. Covenants when made by God are always of the latter sort. He does not discuss their provisions with men, he does not ask men's acceptance of the arrangement. He makes it wholly alone, wholly on his own responsibility, by virtue of his position as man's Creator. So the covenant made to Noah was simply a constitution or arrangement connected with earthly life which God promulgated. Noah had not asked for it. It came wholly out of the thought of the kind Creator's heart. The contents of the covenant were: "Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (v. 11). History, so to say, had now started twice; God promises that he will never bring such an infliction upon it again that a third start shall be necessary.

Let us notice now

I. Some *characteristics* of this covenant.

1. Its origin and continuance were in God. Noah could have had no confidence that there would not soon be another flood like the one he had just escaped, except by the open promise of God. For all Noah knew, until

God spoke, history might be catastrophic; it might be a law of life that sin should grow worse and worse until God could endure it no longer, and then a natural overturning should come, and history begin again. Noah had no reason to think this was not to be a regular process through the ages, until God spoke and showed that by his own determination the catastrophe just passed was to be unique. Even if man were virtuous it was not a natural necessity that such disasters should not be repeated. Only in God and his will could any ground of confidence be found. God did positively settle the matter, and in kindness to men revealed the fact and the character of the settlement. Thenceforth Noah and his descendants need not live in the dreadful suspense of ignorance of the future. God had spoken. He had made a solemn covenant, conceived in his own fatherly heart, announced in characteristic kindness, and guaranteed by his own stability.

2. This covenant was to be perpetual. It did not involve the absence of trouble from men. What are called the accidents of nature were to be part of their discipline. "This promise doth not hinder, 1. But that God may bring other wasting judgments upon mankind. 2. Not but that he may destroy particular places and countries by the inundations of the sea or rivers. 3. Nor will the destruction of the world at the last day by fire be any breach of his promise" (Matthew Henry). But never again should there be an obliteration of all the human race (minus a saving remnant) for the beginning of history over again. There would be destructive natural convulsions, but they should not be universal. Cities and nations might be swept out of existence by earthquake, fire and pestilence, but history should go on. Sin might increase

until the whole civilized world was debased and unspeakably polluted, but the destructive hand of God should not fall again. Once that method had been used, but God's declared intention was not to do so again. This was settled unconditionally, without respect to man's future merits or demerits, wholly by the gracious omnipotence of God. And this is suggested by the very words with which Jehovah began his declaration: "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you" (v. 9). The repetition of the pronoun emphasizes the divinity of the authorship. God seems to say "I, even I, the holy God, condescend to man in his sins. I, even I, the everlasting God, promise this, and by my everlastingness shall see that it is fulfilled to your seed ages after you are dust." The finality of this stable arrangement, this freedom from universal catastrophe, is established in the eternity of its Author.

3. The covenant is symbolized by a natural sign. Some have thought that the terms of the Hebrew require us to believe that there had never been any rainbows yet, or that at least Noah had never seen any, in that comparatively cloudless climate. But it seems more natural to suppose that God took an existing and common phenomenon and gave it a new significance, as he used the stars, already existing, for a sign to Abraham of his special covenant. The choice of the rainbow was perhaps in a sense arbitrary; that is to say, nothing in the rainbow necessarily suggested the meaning it thenceforth had; that meaning was given to it by the act of God. Other things in nature, for aught we can see, might have answered. Still, there was a fitness in the choice. The rainbow always attracts attention; it would tend the more, just for that reason, to suggest the unusual thought thence-

forth connected with it. It is regular in its appearance under proper conditions, and the certainty of its coming would remind man of the certainty of God's promise: after the storm, this pledge that all storms should pass away. The splendor of the rainbow would also tend to impress and elevate the mind, and lead it to dwell upon the splendor of the love of God, of which it was the sign. In offering to man this intellectual crutch, this external helper to internal thoughts and experiences, we see a new mark of the condescension of God's love. Doubtless all nature is in a sense a symbol of spiritual things; from the visible we learn of the invisible; we look "through nature up to nature's God;" but God's extraordinary use of the rainbow symbolically is an unusual mark of his accommodation of things to man's weakness of perception. In connection with it, we cannot but think of the symbol which our Saviour left us in the Lord's supper, which no more than the rainbow has magical power, but is an adjustment of spiritual things to man's wandering and inefficient mind.

II. Certain *revelations* were involved in God's choice of the rainbow as the sign of his covenant.

1. It would always tell of the omnipotence of God. By saying that there would never be another destroying flood, it would recall that there was such a flood once, and would suggest that God could bring about another, if he had not promised not to. It would forever remind man that he is in the hands of Omnipotence, which can do with him what it will. That is the veriest platitude, and yet how little part it has in our practical thinking. A man doubts whether there is any God, not thinking that the very power to have that doubt is given by the omnipotence which, for reasons of its own, sustains his life. We plan all manner of programmes for ourselves, and if they are

interrupted providentially see an unusual interference with the order of things, whereas the unusualness is in our being permitted to plan and accomplish anything of our own, considering that all things are sustained and directed by another for his own purposes. If the attenuated deity of the agnostic, "a power not ourselves," were but vividly comprehended in human lives, the rainbow would not so constantly utter its voiceless message in vain.

2. The rainbow reminds man that God's omnipotence, which could bring about another flood in an instant, is held in check by God's own loving will. God is more than power. In view of the evil of the world, with the vision of sin ever offending his all-seeing eyes, he might well have wished again and again to open the windows of heaven, and to let loose the fountains of the deep. But he has promised. He restrains himself from giving to sin its just deserts. He spares the defiled race of man. At the same time by his grace he works in human hearts so that sin's tendency is thwarted and it is not allowed to develop to the utmost. Those who refuse his grace and persist in wilful sin are sometimes hindered providentially from doing their utmost, sometimes they are allowed to run their course, to exhaust their energies, to wreck their vitality with debaucheries, and then to relieve the world by a sudden and unmourned exit. By grace, by providence, or by the operation of natural laws, God relieves the pressure of evil, ever tending to greater strength, and the world is always kept short of that awful degree of universal sin which would make a second flood necessary, that is, which would make a new historical beginning the only hope for man. God restrains his just wrath, and is long-suffering with sinful men; and at the

same time he is so working among them that the reason for the descent of his wrath is ever kept beneath the necessity of execution.

3. As man looks at the bow set in the clouds he may discover another truth concerning God's ways: that he rules by natural law. The regularity in the appearance of the bow suggests the regularity of God's covenants and of all his appointments. By inference we may know that the sun will rise and set, the seasons come and go, and the natural universe continue in its usual course, because God is regular, and not spasmodic, in his ways. There is no *a priori* reason whatever for this. If God planned every day irregularly, making the sun rise now in the north, to-morrow in the west, next day not at all (which is no impossibility for him), we could not say he had gone beyond his right. Nature is orderly rather than capricious solely because God has seen fit to govern by law rather than by irregular plan. When he likes he varies from this. He can offer miracles when he will. He can send catastrophic floods any day. But he has pledged himself against such catastrophes; he has set the bow in the clouds to remind us that we need not dread the unexpected; God has promised to abide by the laws of nature. Man can sow and reap in peace, he can lie down to rest without foreboding, for God has, of his own gracious will, foregone the right to govern history by annihilating catastrophes.

II. Certain *thoughts* follow the study of the meaning of this covenant with Noah.

1. We find ourselves dwelling fancifully upon God's exquisite bow to see its rich symbolical meaning. Symbolism has no law, and we must guard against extravagance in elaborating symbolical meanings. Yet doubtless

we are entitled to some range of imagination. Lange and Delitzsch both had unusual skill in rational symbolical interpretation, and we can follow them to advantage. To Lange the rainbow expresses (*a*) the elevation of men above the deification of the creature (since the rainbow is not a divinity but only a sign of God), (*b*) man's introduction to the symbolic interpretation of natural phenomena, (*c*) that God's compassion remembers men in their dangers, (*d*) that the setting up a sign of light and fire, while it assures the earth against destruction by water, indicates also its future glorification through light and fire. Delitzsch says: "Shining upon a dark ground which just before broke forth in lightning, it represents the victory of the light of love over the fiery darkness of wrath. Originating from the effect of the sun upon a dark cloud, it typifies the willingness of the heavenly to pervade the earthly. Stretched between heaven and earth, it is a bond of peace between both; and spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the divine mercy."

2. When we think of God's promise that there shall nevermore be any overwhelming physical flood, we cannot but remind ourselves of his many promises that there shall never again be any overwhelming flood of sin, such as made the physical flood necessary. We have noticed already some ways in which God forestalls the tendency of evil to become overwhelming, but now we are noticing particularly that the restriction of evil is a matter of revelation. Particularly in the Psalms are we reminded of the certainty that God will thwart the wicked in their presumptuous career, and will prevent the accomplishment of their desolating plans, and will thus protect the earth from a deluge of crime. David saw "the floods of un-



godly men" all about him (Ps. 18:3), but the Lord brought him, like Noah, "into a large place" (v. 19). Again he tells us, "fret not thyself because of evil doers" (Ps. 37:1), as though everything were about to be overturned by their power; "for they shall soon be cut down like the grass" (v. 2). Again he was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73:3), but counselling with God in the sanctuary the truth came to him, and he saw their end: "How are they brought to desolation as in a moment!" (v. 19.) Again he sees all the mighty kings and peoples of the earth conspiring together against the Lord, but he dashes them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps. 2). But the most vivid setting forth of this truth is in Ps. 93, which might be called "the Psalm of the flood of sin." There we see the mighty overwhelming waves of evil rising higher and higher, as though to cover the very throne of God; but the Lord still reigneth, his throne is set too high for the flood of sin, he is mightier than the noise of many waters. Thanks be to God that as we look at his bow we may be sure there will be no other catastrophic flood of waters; thanks be to him also, that we may be equally sure there will never again be such a flood of sin as made the other flood a necessity.

3. "It is important for us not to suffer our relations to Adam as our first father, or to Abraham as the father of the faithful, to overshadow our part in God's covenant with Noah as the ancestor of the existing human race" (Schaff). Does Noah seem to have any relation to us really? Have we overlooked the fact that he does? Henceforth let us be more mindful of God's merciful promise made to us in him. The covenants are not so many that we should not remember them all.

## BEGINNING OF THE HEBREW NATION.

GEN. 12: 1-9.

THE call of Abram is often spoken of as the most important event in the Old Testament. It is one of the "beginnings of history," one of the mile-posts in the long progress of the centuries. Here Judaism begins. Here is the fountain-head of the monotheism of the Jew, the Mohammedan and the Christian, who together embody the chief religious forces of history. Here is a new stage in the development of God's Messianic plans, which cover all ages and are completed at last only in the land beyond the stars. It is no wonder that this ancient migration has been the source of many a dreamy legend in the story-telling East, has quickened the fancy of many a poet, and given to the historians of the ancient church a splendid theme for not unwarranted eloquence. And its pointed use for us personally is unmistakable. As we read these ancient words, taking us away to a world so old as almost to seem unreal, we feel that we too belong to another world, that God calls us, and makes pilgrims of us, and sets in our hearts the dream of a better country, even a heavenly.

I. *The call.* It is the voice of God that falls upon the ear of the patriarch, the voice which gives life and takes it back again unto the giver; the voice which creates, which rules, which accomplishes, but which weak man may disregard if he will. It is God's right to speak to us wheresoever he will, and to lay upon us whatsoever injunctions he will, without our being justified in feeling that

we are in any wise wronged thereby. For he is God and we are his creatures. But we may be assured that, inexplicable as his ways to us may seem sometimes, they are never arbitrary or undeserving of our submission, because God is not only a God of power but also of wisdom, and most of all of love. His call to us is always the call of righteousness and grace.

The call of Abram was to separation from others. He was to leave country, and kindred, and his father's house (v. 1). The narrative of Genesis shows that this call led Abram away from Haran (v. 4), but the narrative of Stephen (Acts 9: 2) shows us that the call had come to Abram while he lived in Ur of the Chaldees, and had been the cause of Terah's removal thence to Haran. This makes considerable difference in our estimation of Abram's sacrifice, for it would be much harder to leave Ur than to leave Haran. Ur was in the midst of the highest civilization the world knew at that time, and, slight as Abram's connection with it may have been, still it meant surely much to him as it would to any man. This he was to leave behind and with it the personal attachments which he had there; and he must also break those ties of place which are always precious to the heart of man. Why could not the Lord have left him in Ur of the Chaldees, and used him there for his beneficent purposes? Because it is the Lord's way to separate in order to use. He shuts up Noah in the ark, he takes Israel off into the forty years' wandering, he carries Elijah into the desert, he makes John the Baptist a Nazarite, he sends Paul to Arabia, he leads the Saviour into the wilderness. "Come ye out from among them," he often says to us, and the things we must give up are often dear.

But the separation is not for separation's sake, but

for a purpose beyond. Just as a young man must go away from home, and weaken the attachments of his early years, to acquire the education with which he is to enter again into life in order to do the more efficient work, so God takes Abram out of those social and local relations which are most dear, and leads him off alone, but in order that he may at last establish such a glorious relation between him and others that all mankind may be able to call him blessed. It is odd that we know nothing of Abram's life at Ur. It may have been honorable and good. But if he had stayed there we should never have heard from him. He must give up, must make a great sacrifice, must cut himself off from the old life; then God will do great things through him. The result was to be four-fold; (*a*) Abram was to be the father of a great nation, (*b*) to have material and spiritual prosperity, (*c*) to have an exalted name, (*d*) and to be the dispenser of blessing (vs. 2-3, Keil). He was to be a universal mediator, through whom good should come to countless generations; and the number of those blessed through him should exceed those not so blessed (for God would bless *them* [plural] who blessed him, and curse *him* [singular] who cursed him). If Abram had stayed in Ur monotheism would have been in peril, and history would have lost much of its progress, for "the faith in the One Living God, which seemed to require the admission of a monotheistic instinct, grafted in every member of the Semitic family is traced back to one man" (Max Müller). In Abram we see in a marvellous way the truth of the saying that "no man liveth to himself."

2. *The answer.* "So Abram departed" (v. 4), he obeyed the call of God at once. Whatever country he went to could not possess possibly the civilized privileges of Chaldæa. If he were to be the propagator of good he

could not find any place more advantageous than Ur in which he could work upon others. If he were meant to grow into a great family the conditions of nomadic life in an unknown place could not be as favorable to that end as in the safe home he knew in the East. How many cogent reasons Abram might have found for staying in Ur, and after that for staying in Haran. All the considerations which make it inadvisable for any one to be a rolling stone were valid also for him. But as against the voice of God, such thoughts (if he had them) had no value. His not to reason why. God called him away from Ur, away from Haran, and he went.

To add to the hardship, he "went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11 : 8). He took up his chattels and departed in sheer ignorance of his destination. He was as much in the dark as to his ultimate resting-place as Columbus pointing his vessel's prow out over the untraversed sea. His orders were sealed, and he had no idea of anything save direction. Westward he turned, but all else was obscure. It is to be noted that this hardship of ignorance of the end, together with the need of separation from what he loved, was a necessary part of his doing the work God had for him to do. His self-denial, thus made double, was his equipment for the purposes of God. He loved the old home—he gave it up; he loved to know for what—he gave that up. He illustrates the ever valid truth concerning God's use of men for his work, that they get by giving up, win by losing, save their life by sacrificing it. God made us with minds that want to know; to be willing not to know when he asks it makes it the more possible for him to use us. So we are tools ready for his hand.

But Abram believed in God. This is why he was

willing to sacrifice whatever Ur and Haran meant to him, and to suppress the natural longing to be sure of the place to which he was going. He was not irrational. He was giving up very tangible things, but not for nothing. God was more to him than they were. There were compensations in the service of the heavenly Friend more than adequate to counterbalance all that was given up for its sake. But notice that they were known by faith only. There was no certainty about them, no vision of them, except such as belongs to faith. Abram's friends might have said that he was giving up sure things for what was doubtful, but he believed in God. That was the supreme and all-absorbing element in his soul. Cost was nothing, tangibility was nothing, if he only had God. What sublime trust! It is no wonder the Arabs call him by eminence "El Khalil," the Friend, because of his confidence in God. He is the spiritual ancestor of all who are willing to trust God without seeing, to believe in his kindness even when it exacts the most costly sacrifices; he is the "father of the faithful."

III. It is interesting to note the immediate *status* in which Abram found himself after such a noble exercise of faith.

We do not find it full of that comfort which we might have expected as a reward of his sacrifices for God. Instead of being a settler enjoying the riches of the land to which he was led, we find him a wanderer, moving his household encampment from one place to another, driven about by famine, compelled more or less to struggle with hostile tribes for a foothold, and without that absolutely peaceful and easy-going life which we might have hoped would come to him after having given up so much. But is this not true to life? Were the other patriarchs and

the prophets free from trouble when they served God? What of Elijah and Jeremiah? What of Job? What of John the Baptist, and Jesus? What of James and Peter and Paul? Did not the way of duty lead all of them into hardship? To give up for God, entering into the life of faith, means often that then real difficulties will begin. The world develops its opposition and we find ourselves upon "the thorn-road and none other." Obedience is always expensive.

"If I find him, if I follow,  
What his guerdon here?—  
Many a sorrow, many a labor,  
Many a tear."

Obstacles arose in Abram's way as he wandered. "And the Canaanite was then in the land." It was promised to Abram and his seed, but it would be many a year before they enjoyed it in peace, and their title to its possession had to be written in blood. God does not exempt those who have faith in him from the common burdens and temptations of life. We see his own Son, whose life was ideal, made perfect by suffering. If Abram hoped that by leaving Ur and going into an unknown land in faith he was to earn freedom from care, temptation and struggle, he must have been greatly disappointed. But it is a new mark of his trust in God that, after having been led by it into sacrifice, he still accepted it and lived by it, when a life of wandering and more or less difficulty came next. It requires faith to be willing to give up for God, but it sometimes requires a still more robust faith to endure the unexpected difficulties which multiply about us afterwards.

But Abram was able to endure thus, and keep faith

burning brightly, because he was sustained by God. God did not accept his sublime initial faith which led to the emigration and set him adrift in the unknown land to fight his battles alone. He came to him, he even appeared unto him, and reassured him by repeating over again a part of his former promise (v. 7). If Elijah fled into the wilderness, the Lord miraculously sustained him (1 Kings, 17:6). If Jeremiah found himself in disfavor for serving God, and he and his friends were in great danger, still "the Lord hid them" (Jer. 36:28). If Paul found himself in prison because of the testimony of the truth, the Lord stood by and comforted him (Acts 23:11). The picture of our Saviour in the wilderness being tempted shows what we may expect if we believe in God and try to serve him, but we must never overlook the fact that out there in the desert "angels came and ministered unto him" (Matt. 4:11). God does not forget his own. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all" (Ps. 34:19).

And to the helpful vision of God Abram gave reply in a new act of faith, by building there an altar unto the Lord (v. 7). This was to Abram doubtless a high form of joy. One of the sweetest delights of the soul is to refresh itself in the adoration of God. And it is interesting to note that in seeking this spiritual comfort we are at the same moment offering new service to God. By the erection of this altar, Abram was proclaiming Jehovah's name, and was a preacher of the true righteousness. "Under the branches of that sacred tree, which, after looking down on the cruel and impure rites of many more generations, was still to stand, a venerable landmark in the eyes of his conquering descendants, Abram reared his first rude altar to Jehovah on the soil of Canaan"



(Dykes). As we think of Abram we see that there is a certain rotary motion in the progress of faith: first comes the giving up in obedience to God; then comes the life of hardship requiring new faith; to meet this God reveals himself; at once the soul goes up to him in new faith, erecting its altar, which is a sign that it is ready for new deprivations if necessary. And so the movement ever goes on through trouble to the vision of God which is a means of new faith, which makes us equal to still other trials, and so on and on, to greater faith and greater spiritual insight and greater joy.

IV. The *practical lessons* of this splendid passage are many.

1. The sublimity of faith is plain as we watch the grand old man of God leaving his home at the bidding of the Lord. It requires no unusual grace of character to be able to enjoy blessings. Any one can do that. But what grace does it require to believe in those blessings, while wholly hidden, so absolutely that one will leave a present and substantial good for them. Somehow, sometime, Abram believed God would fulfil all his promises. But he saw not where. This was sheer faith, treating the non-existent as though it were real, the future as though it were present, the invisible as though one had it within his grasp. Such faith God hopes also to find in us. He himself is unseen, Christ our Saviour is unseen, the Comforter, heaven, the reward of the just, the joy of the saints, the meeting with our lost, all these are invisible to us; but God wishes us to rise above the limitations of reasoning founded only on the senses, and believe in that which eye hath not yet seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man.

2. And for this faith he asks us to give up many a

tangible and vivid present experience. Instead of serving the self we know, we are to serve God whom our eyes have not beheld. Instead of the pleasures of sense which are within our grasp for a season, we are to seek the rare spiritual joys which come to the soul that turns towards the invisible Father. We are to let go of things present for the expectation of things to come. We are to part with things really now in our possession, because of confidence in what we cannot behold. Ur was no more real to Abram than the real things which we must give up for the veiled God and the hidden Christ. Blessed are those who, true children of Abram, serve God thus, enduring as seeing him who is invisible.

3. This seems forbidding, put in such a bare way. But we are not to forget that God is with us. With every sacrifice he grants us more of the joy of his presence. When we give up other things we reach out our empty hands and touch him. He takes away things we have, but he comes into their place himself and gives us his heavenly peace. Never does God ask us for any endurance for which he does not supply adequate grace. Never do we empty ourselves, never are we deprived of anything dear, but God comes to us and gives us more than he takes. So that always we are able to give up more for him, and always are receiving more of his grace.

4. And what is it all for? Abram stands out on the canvas of ancient history, a sublime witness to the one living God. And by our faith in God we too, in our lesser way, proclaim Jehovah. To be lights witnessing by reflection to the greater light is our function. By faith we fulfil man's chief end, which is, to glorify God.

5. And this is for far-reaching purposes hid in the mind of God. By his simple and instantly obedient

faith Abram did better than he knew. In him mankind is brought together again under one blessing. To all the human race he is a beneficent helper through his faith in God. And God can use us for things of untold greatness if we trust in him. They are hidden from us, but known to him who uses every obedient soul for the achievement of his celestial aims.

## VI. GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM.

GEN. 17 : 1-9.

As the death of Christ is the centre of the economy of the New Testament, so the covenant made with Abraham is the centre of the economy of the Old. If we leave out the death of Christ in trying to analyze Christianity in order to know its meaning and the secret of its strength, we can have no possible satisfactory explanation, but must flounder about among externals (like Gibbon in his famous chapter xv). If in trying to understand the historic preparation for Christianity we fail to use the Abrahamic covenant as the clue, we shall find ancient history to be only a mass of unrelated details. The understanding of this covenant is, therefore, the most important thing in the study of the Old Testament. Here especially it becomes evident, as Augustine says, that the New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New. Certain general considerations help us somewhat to understand it.

1. There is a development in the revelation made by God of his saving purpose. Notice that the change is not in his purpose; there is no development or evolution in him who is unchangeable, and needeth not to repent, and seeth the end from the beginning. The development is in man's knowledge of God's saving purpose, and this is not a natural but a supernatural development. Men do not find out more and more of God's plan by study (as we find out natural truth), but by having more information given to them directly by God. So that we should

say there is progress in God's revelation, rather than an evolution of man's knowledge. This increase in plainness in God's impartation of his saving plans is due to the fact that the salvation must be accepted by men voluntarily one by one, and therefore must be understood in some degree by them. God therefore condescends to tell them gradually (as the time for the accomplishing of the saving work upon the arena of history approaches), more and more plainly, the method of salvation, that it may not seem strange to them, and that they may be led to accept it the more readily. No purpose could have been accomplished by God's revealing fully the plan of salvation at first. The progress of his disclosure of his salvation may be represented by a concentric series of circles. The outermost is the first definition of salvation, the first dim prophecy of its accomplishment; this is the *protevangelium*, the primitive gospel, the first promise to Eve that her seed should conquer the Evil One (Gen. 3:14-15). The second and smaller circle, defining the origin of salvation more restrictedly, is the blessing of Shem (Gen. 9:26-27). Here it is seen that God is to take a part of the human race for special blessing. This is narrowed still more in the third circle, which is the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Of all the descendants of Shem only the limited number who descend from Abraham are to receive the special blessing of God, which they are to be instrumental in giving to all the nations of the earth. The circle narrows a fourth time to the descendants of Judah among the Abrahamic family (Gen. 49:8-12). Narrowing again, the fifth circle makes David and his descendants the channel of God's blessing (2 Sam. 11:16). The circle at last is narrowed, at the sixth step, to a point where Isaiah announces that salva-

tion is not to come through a family, but through a single person, the "suffering servant" of Jehovah (Isa. 52: 13--53: 12). Here God's revelations of the means of salvation before the event culminate in the most sublime, the most "evangelical" passage of the Old Testament. Jesus was the personal Messiah, the suffering servant of Jehovah, the centre of the house of David, the tribe of Judah, the family of Abraham, the family of Shem, the family of Adam. Abraham thus takes his place in God's plan. But he has a special importance—his circle ought to be drawn with a heavier line than any of the others, so that abridged the series would have three steps: Adam, Abraham, Christ.

2. The emphatic place of the covenant with Abraham is evident from the number of times it was emphasized by God to him, with new details added each time. There is progress in the Messianic revelations of the Old Testament (of which the Abrahamic covenant is one), as we have seen, and there is progress within the Abrahamic covenant itself, in that it has stages of announcement. It is first proclaimed in Gen. 12: 1-3, at "the beginning of the Hebrew nation." Its substance is *separation* for the *blessing of human kind*. Gen. 13: 14-18 gives a second declaration of it, when the *largeness* of the promise is made emphatic by the comparison to the dust of the number of those who are to be blessed. The third step is Gen. 15, where the accomplishment of the end only after *trouble* is revealed. The fourth step is our lesson (Gen. 17: 1-9), whose prominent element is the designation of the *land of Canaan* as the means of accomplishing the promise, followed by the naming of the *sign* of the covenant. The fifth and last step is the confirmation by an *oath* of all that went before (Gen. 22: 15-18).

3. The name of God, El Shaddai, which is connected with the stage of revelation reached in our lesson, is important, and evidently meant to be important by God's own use of it. In the three covenants, or divine constitutions given to man for his government, which stand out in the old economy, three divine names are used. In the covenant given to Noah God is called *Elohim* (the most common name of deity) which comes from a root meaning to fear, and designates God as the highest object of *reverence*. In the covenant given to Abraham (our lesson) God calls himself *El Shaddai*, the *Almighty* One. In the covenant given to the children of Israel through Moses, God is called Jehovah (or more accurately, according to the Hebrew, *Jahveh*), which has been interpreted as meaning either the eternally self-existent One, or perhaps better (as the idea of activity seems to be prominent in the Hebrew form) the self-revealing One, "the ever-living personal God of revelation." Although Abram and Sarai were aged people, God meant still to give them a son who should be the ancestor of a people numerous as the stars. This is why God calls himself El Shaddai, the Almighty, in this connection. He is going to use his omnipotence to overcome nature. "Elohim is the God who so made nature that it exists, and so preserves it that it consists. El Shaddai is the God who so constrains nature that it does his will, and so subdues it that it bows to and subserves grace. Jahveh is the God who carries out the purposes of grace in the midst of nature, and at last puts a new creation of grace in the place of nature. Hence the covenant with Noah was made in the name Elohim, for this covenant is by its very nature a renewal and guarantee of the order of creation, which had been broken through by the Flood; the covenant with the

patriarchs in the name El Shaddai, for it is by its nature the subdual of corrupted and perishable nature and the foundation of the marvellous work of grace; and the covenant with Israel in the name Jahveh, for it is in its nature the completion of this work of grace and its carrying on to the climax of its perfection" (Delitzsch).

4. The contents of the covenant with Abraham, in its fourth stage (our lesson). As contrasted with the three steps of its announcement preceding this, and the one following, the peculiarity of this one is the designation of the land of Canaan by name as the means territorially, the location, of God's accomplishment of the promise (which is followed by the naming of circumcision as the sign of the covenant). But aside from this special point in this revelation of the covenant other elements (not peculiar to this) are contained in it. The whole contents of the covenant as here given are (*a*) a large progeny (v. 2), (*b*) reaching even to the magnitude of nations (v. 4), (*c*) with all of whom Abraham is to have immediate connection personally as father (v. 5), (*d*) which connection is to have all earthly glory connected with it through kingly descendants (v. 6), (*e*) and is to be everlasting (v. 7), (*f*) and to have, as its most distinguishing element and splendor, God's gift of himself to them as their God (v. 7), (*g*) all of which is to be accomplished here on this tangible earth in a definite place (v. 8.) Or, to sum these many details up in briefer form, this utterance of the covenant embraces three promises: "1, People and kings, even rich kings, should come from him; 2, the covenant of blessing from God with him and his seed should be *eternal*; 3, the whole land of Canaan should belong to his seed for an eternal possession" (Lange).

5. The pledge of the fulfillment of all these splendid



promises God gives to Abram in a special reminder, to wit, his own name, which is now changed from Abram, "exalted father," to Abraham, "father of a multitude." Abraham could never think upon his own name without remembering who gave it him, and recalling its meaning: that he, by the power of El Shaddai, the omnipotent One, in spite of natural obstacles, should become the father of a multitude to whom God was to be peculiarly God, and through whom, because of this, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Dods says this change of Abram's name was sacramental. "The sacramental character of a name consists in its divine appointment to represent and commemorate and testify some special grace and blessing, and so to be a permanent pledge of its bestowal" (Wilkinson). What the rainbow was to Noah the new name was to Abraham—except that the latter had a more intense personal application.

This lesson, thus analyzed into its special relations, has the broadest and at the same time the most narrowly personal applications.

1. We see something here of God's vast general work in history.

He has plans. Looked at near by history seems a strange *mélange*. Things appear thrown together in a heap without order or thought. Out of this conception have sprung the words *happen* and *chance*. But when God permits us for a moment to stand afar off and see things, as far as we are able, with his eyes, we see that there is a design in everything. There is no historic waste. All things work together. *Chance* and *happen* are but mementoes of human blundering; there is no reality corresponding to them.

In working out his great redemption plans God uses

men. Abraham was only an Arab sheik of an age long gone. How insignificant his life seems when we set beside it a vision of our modern life of steam and electricity, of huge libraries and ponderous philosophy. Was that living at all? Yes, Abraham lived one of the noblest of lives, and occupies one of the most conspicuous places in history, because God used him. And God wants to use us.

God's purpose, in working out which Abraham took so splendid a place, is gracious. Its consequence is meant to be blessed for the souls of men. When we think of God as the ruler of all we are so impressed with the thought of his omnipotence and his omniscience that we may overlook that (even more than these) God is love. The increasing purpose which runs through the ages is the bringing of joy to men.

2. In studying the covenant with Abraham we see something of the details of God's manner of working out his plan.

He has a method in carrying it out, which is often submerged, but is always reappearing to testify to the consistency of God in his own workings. This method is, that through a part God will bless the whole. Leaven is the symbol of God's way. This is not a necessary method for him so far as we can see, but it is his choice, and he abides by it. A part of Adam's seed (Shem) is to bless the rest, a part of Shem's seed (Abraham) is to bless the rest, a part of Abraham's seed (Judah) is to bless the rest, a part of Judah's seed (David) is to bless the rest, a part of David's seed (Jesus Christ) is to bless the rest. So from the smallest centre, from the life of one man, all the myriads of the human race are to receive the fulfillment of the promise graciously made in Eden. And what

is true in this large way is true in a lesser way, for God uses each one of us for the blessing of many others. Andrew sees Christ, and tells Simon, and the circle widens.

In accomplishing his great purpose according to this special method, God uses means. His working is not in the air, it is here in palpable things. The land of Canaan was taken by God, the Creator, from those whom he had allowed to use it for a little time, in order that he might use it for himself. There he nurtured his peculiar people, making them strong numerically, disciplining them, and using them for the preservation and propagation of his saving truth. And not only Canaan but all lands and all ages have their place in the consummation of God's eternal plan. India with her mysticism, Greece with her language, Rome with her laws, the Teutons with their sense of personal liberty, all put their hands to the wheel of God's chariot.

It is no obstacle or hindrance to God's plan that it is age-long in its accomplishment. We may murmur at the lapse of centuries with maybe only one very simple idea added to God's revelation of his grace. But what are centuries to him who abides in eternity? His thoughts are not as our thoughts.

3. Abraham's relation to God and God's plans has more than a homiletical relation to us. Abraham in many things is an example to us. But he is infinitely more: he is the channel of divine grace to us.

For God's covenant made with him is everlasting. Moses did not supplant it. David did not abolish it. Isaiah did not reveal a better way. Christ did not make it obsolete. On the contrary, he fulfilled it. The promise made to Abraham is binding (by reason of God's own act) upon God for ever. As long as there are men

to be blessed, Abraham will be an important person to them.

Our connection with him is not that of blood, however. Canaan served its purpose and is no longer the only theatre of God's gracious working. The Jew had his place and time in God's plan, but the plan has advanced beyond the need of him any more. That plan has been spiritualized, and relationship with Abraham and his covenant is secured now not through bodily but through spiritual descent—through faith, the same sort of faith which Abraham had and which was counted to him for righteousness. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7).

Yet the point of contact between us and Abraham is not our faith, but the person upon whom faith (Abraham's no less than ours) centres: Jesus Christ. Abraham's faith "was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:22-25). Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ (John 8:56). And the Christ to whom he looked as the fulfiller of the covenant of God with him is the Christ in whom we find our personal salvation; which is the fulfillment of that everlasting covenant.

## GOD'S JUDGMENT ON SODOM.

GEN. 18:22-33.

THE story of Abraham pleading for Sodom is one of the noblest in the whole Old Testament. The glorious freedom and breadth of view possible to us under the reign of God's Son induce in us sometimes the thought that the men of olden time were narrow. It is true that for a time there was a narrowing brought about immediately by God for the purpose of conserving special historical elements which would have been lost otherwise. The temporary narrowness was in order to an ultimate broadening, just as a temporary war is sometimes a step towards final peace. But Abraham does not come within that period of restriction. The promise to him was meant for the blessing of all mankind, and not the Jew only. And so Abraham's outlook is over all men, over those who are alien to him in race and habits. It is not a Jew but a citizen of the world who prays for heathen Sodom.

A point of interest, which has caught the attention of numberless commentators, is the relation of God to the three men, or angels, whom Abraham entertained. We are told that "the Lord," i. e., Jehovah, "appeared unto him" (18:1). "Three men stood by him" (v. 2), whom he addressed as "my Lord" (v. 3), a name of God in the Pentateuch (Oehler)—although the Revisers write it "my lord," understanding it as a simple title of address. Sometimes "*they* said" (v. 9), sometimes "*he* said" (v. 10), i. e., one of the three. Again, "*the Lord* said" (i. e., Jehovah), (v. 13), while "*the men* rose up

from thence," (v. 16). Twice more the expression occurs "the *Lord* said" (vs. 17, 20), while again we are told that "the *men* turned their faces from thence . . . but Abraham stood yet before *the Lord*." Comparing this last expression with 19:1, we see that two of the three men-angels went to Sodom, while the third remained and listened to the pleading of Abraham. All this is sufficiently perplexing. The most reasonable explanation is given by Delitzsch: "It is not the case that one of the three angels is the appearance of Jahveh [Dillmann], but that there are three heavenly messengers, in whom Jahveh manifests himself, three by reason of the nature of their vocation, which is not to promise only, but also to punish and to deliver. Because, however, the message of grace to Abraham is a higher one than the messages of judgment and mercy to Lot, the two are subordinate to the one, and Jahveh is specially present to Abraham in the one, whom he recognizes as above the other two and addresses as Adonai, Lord of all, because he has made upon him the impression of a being in whom God is, and whom he is to receive as God himself."

One other thing it is necessary to understand in approaching the episode of Abraham's intercessory prayer, and that is, that Sodom was at the lowest stage of wickedness. It is not necessary to show to ourselves that this was so or why it was so. It is only required that we should assume it in order to appreciate what follows. We may say without danger of contradiction that Sodom was as bad as bad could be. It deserved to be wiped off the face of the earth.

Sodom, however, is not one of the subjects for our study at this moment. It is a presupposition, but it stands in the background. Two persons are the figures for our

study: Abraham and God (as represented and incarnated in the angel whom Abraham addresses).

I. We see Abraham acting as an *offerer of prayer*. Sometimes he appears to us as the pilgrim, or the friend of God, or the loyal relative, or the man of tried faith. His character has many interesting sides. Here he is the offerer of prayer.

1. *Confidence in the character of God* marks him in this aspect. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" is the foundation of his reasoning about God. Partly by revelation, partly by experience, partly doubtless by his own thinking, Abraham had reached a certain lofty conception of God. He was confident that this conception was not too noble. His question is not a query as to whether he could be mistaken in his estimate of God, for about that he had no doubt. It is a mere rhetorical question, which assumes an indisputably certain answer. Certainly the Judge of all the earth could do nothing but the right. Abraham's creed began with the downright assertion, "I believe in God." All prayer rests upon this supposition. How hard it would be for one who did not believe in a God, or for one who believed (like the old Greeks) that the character of God is fickle, to justify prayer. We know that we should pray, how to pray, and what to pray for, because God has revealed to us that he is and what he is. It would not be a bad custom for us sometimes, when we pray, to ask ourselves what kind of a God it is we are approaching.

2. *Belief in man* also characterized Abraham's prayer. He was an optimist even in sight of Sodom. The wickedness of that wicked place he did not dispute (v. 23). Indeed, that would have been very difficult to do. But Abraham believed that in spite of this black

degradation there might be perhaps in Sodom as many as fifty righteous (v. 24), "by which we understand not merely sinless or holy men, but men who through the fear of God and conscientiousness had kept themselves free from the prevailing sin and iniquity of these cities" (Keil). He tried to put the best estimate possible on the wicked city, and to hope as much as he dared concerning it. Perhaps he also had a dim thought that if the cities were spared the fifty righteous men might lead to their reclamation (which God knew to be impracticable). There is a lesson for us in Abraham's optimism. God only knows how bad actually any place or any man may be. But we should hope that there may be something of good everywhere, and act as though we believed in its existence.

3. *Unselfishness* distinguishes this prayer of Abraham. He had nothing to gain by its being answered. He was safe, body and soul. But he was not so narrow as to think that his interests were all satisfied thereby. He remembered Lot, who had treated him somewhat shabbily in the partition of lands. Abraham bears him no grudge for his selfish greed at that time. On the contrary, he is solicitous and prayerful for his safety. And yet his interest in Sodom is not wholly that of a man in his relatives. He does not mention Lot by name in his prayers. He is interested in all who live in the place. He stands before us as a grand humanitarian, whose sympathies go out to all mankind. It was eminently fitting that the man through whom the whole human race was to be blessed should show such broad feeling for the welfare of all men. There was great enthusiasm in the ancient Roman theatre when one of the actors uttered for the first time the noble sentiment: "I am a man, and nothing which concerns man do I think to be without interest to



myself." That seemed a new discovery in those Roman days. But it was old as Abraham. He too felt a love for man as man. Sodom was bad as it could be, but he hoped as hard as he could that there was good in it, and prayed for it correspondingly.

4. The *earnestness* with which Abraham contended for the aid of Sodom is apparent. Strenuousness appears in the persistence of his appeals. Corrected in his first over-estimate of the number of righteous men in Sodom, he makes a second and a third estimate, and still others after that, hesitating to give up his optimism until it is made absolutely impossible. He tries as hard as he can to find some basis on which the city might be exempted from destruction. He presses the point of God's justice. He holds out in his sympathetic enterprise to the latest moment. One might imagine from this that he had some vast personal interest in the preservation of Sodom. Men are not often so earnest in preferring requests to God unless there be something of personal gain at stake. We are reminded of Paul's disinterested prayers for his brethren after the flesh, and Christ's weeping over Jerusalem. It is easy enough to be earnest in our prayers for ourselves or our friends, but the high mark to which we must aspire is to have a like earnestness in our prayers for others, for strangers, for all mankind.

5. Abraham showed great *boldness* in the way in which he addressed his requests to God. There was boldness in praying for desperately wicked Sodom at all. Convicted of error in his estimate of the number of righteous men in it, there was boldness in his repeated return to a new estimate and a new request. The truth was, he wanted with all his heart to have miserable Sodom saved if it were possible, and he dared to ask for what he want-

ed. There is a certain amount of daring involved in any prayer. We can understand the feeling which some have experienced that it is better not to make any requests to God at all, but to offer him simply prayers of adoration and submission. But God does not limit us so, and it is not natural for us to pray so. We would like to ask for what we want, and God wishes us above all to be sincere. There is no harm in asking for anything so long as it is in "the name of Christ," i. e., so long as it is asked in accordance with his principles of life and obedience to God, and in the consciousness of dependence upon him as our mediator. God surely wants us to be ourselves in our prayers if anywhere. We are not in half as much danger of asking unwise things as of not asking fervently and boldly for what we really need.

6. Yet *humility* went with boldness in Abraham's pleadings for Sodom. He recognizes the majesty of Jehovah, and remembers that before him he is but dust and ashes (v. 27). He feels that perhaps his boldness might justly anger the holy God (v. 30). Repeatedly he uses deprecatory expressions (vs. 31, 32). He does not forget for a moment who it was he is addressing. And when little by little his hopes for the righteousness in Sodom are diminished and the grounds for his request are lessened, and at last even his minimum of ten righteous men is shown to be too great, he ceases to press the matter disputatiously. He leaves the outcome in the hands of the just God. He knows when to stop. "There is a distinction between the mere *begging*, which knows no limit, and the *prayer*, which is conscious that it is limited through the moral nature or spirit, and indeed by the Holy Spirit" (Lange). If Abraham exhibited what has been called "the shamelessness of faith" (see Luke 11:8)

in his pressing importunity, if it were true, as Luther thought, that "tears ran down his face and his words passed into unspeakable sighs," yet he did not think that he was wiser than God. At last he humbly leaves his desire with the All-wise, knowing that his disposal of it will be right.

II. God as *the receiver of prayer* is also offered here to our thought.

I. We see that he does *listen* to our cry. "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" (Psa. 94:9.) There is more in that question than is guessed sometimes. Can a Creator give greater powers to his creatures than he possesses himself? Can an effect be greater than its cause? Granted a God, must he not have in his own being all the powers which he is able to bestow upon his creatures, and in far larger extent? Can I hear and see? Then God, who gave me such powers, must have had them in possession before he could bestow them, and must be characterized by them himself. Can I answer those who speak to me and give to them things they ask? So then can God also, who gave me this power. If we, being inferior, have such ability, how much more must the Father have it from whom our ability comes (Matt. 7:11). The philosophical difficulties of prayer arise from the limitations of the human reason. The trouble is not in prayer itself but in our understanding of it, which is a different matter. God has no trouble in hearing us when we call upon him, nor in answering when he will. The prayers which precede events are as much a part of his plan as the events themselves. But even if we did not have that relieving thought, to hear and answer prayer would be quite as possible to the Omnipotent.

2. With Abraham as with us God shows *forbearance*. There is something not altogether pleasant to us in the spectacle of Abraham's "beating down" God from fifty to ten (Dods). This Jewish "trading spirit" is said to have excited laughter in Voltaire. But the more childlike or even childish Abraham's prayer is made to seem the more is God's patience with him revealed. If all the prayers of the Bible were ideal prayers we should be discouraged. For we often feel that our petitions are very inadequate for the presence of the holy God. There is no splendor in our broken words such as could please him; there is not much of that sane thoughtfulness in our requests which we are sure he desires. What can we do? Shall we stop praying? Oh, no! Let us keep on, unworthily, foolishly, if it be. God is a God of forbearance and will hear us still.

3. God accepts as valid *the estimate* which Abraham puts *upon his character*. The patriarch appeals to the divine justice, and God allows the plea to stand. He does not correct the error which Abraham makes in supposing that God always lets earthly calamities come according to moral deserts, and that God would do wrong if he took innocent lives away from earth. The truth on these points was not yet made plain. The time for that had not yet come. Abraham's inference as to what God could do and still be just was incorrect, but his premise that God is just was valid. God accepts what was right in Abraham's thoughts; he even adjusts himself to the limitations of Abraham's moral apprehension. He comes down and reasons with him on his own grounds. What infinite condescension! We sometimes fancy that God cannot do much for us until we are thoroughly enlightened, until we have a very plain idea of him and his truth.

But the thief on the cross knew very little and yet was saved. A child's salvation is as valid as a man's.

4. Did God *answer* Abraham's prayer? Sodom was destroyed doubtless. But what was the feeling which prompted the prayer? A broad sympathy with humanity. Abraham desired and asked the good of men. But if Sodom had been spared humanity would have been harmed. The destruction of the cities of the plain was really beneficent. Literally Abraham's prayer seems to have been refused, but really the spirit which prompted it was satisfied and the prayer was answered. "Though the particular object of his petitions was not accorded to him, yet the avowed conditions on which it would have been granted show that no limits, but such as a concern for his own honor induced God to fix, can be assigned to the exercise of his grace in answer to his people's prayers" (Bush).

Of what does the grand figure of Abraham's pleading for Sodom remind us? Of the nobler figure of our great Intercessor. And he not only pleads for us, but shows us how to plead for others. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men" (1 Tim. 2:1).

## TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

GEN. 22 : 1-13.

IN the Old Testament we have the record of many special revelations of divine truth, and we have also the record of the way in which these revelations bore upon the life of God's people. The climax of truth revealed is the 53d chapter of Isaiah; the climax of truth appropriated is the 22d chapter of Genesis. These are two mountain peaks, illuminated alike by the shining of the Sun of righteousness. Isaiah tells of the suffering Servant of Jehovah, and Abraham portrays unwittingly the great substitutionary idea of sacrifice which interprets to us the cross of Christ.

In Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac we see the full exhibition of that which characterized all his life, faith in God. "The obedience of faith drew Abraham into a strange land; by the humility of faith he gave way to his nephew Lot; strong in faith, he fought four kings of the heathen with three hundred and eighteen men; firm in faith, he rested in the word of promise, notwithstanding all the opposition of reason and nature; bold in faith, he entreated the preservation of Sodom under increasingly lowered conditions; joyful in faith, he received, named and circumcised the son of promise; with the loyalty of faith he submitted at the bidding of God to the will of Sarah and expelled Hagar and Ishmael; and with the gratitude of faith he planted a tamarisk to the ever-faithful God in the place where Abimelech had sued for his friendship and accepted his present; now his faith was to be put to

the severest test to prove itself victorious, and to be rewarded accordingly" (Delitzsch). We are to notice

I. *The trial.*

1. Its origin. (a) It was from God. "God did tempt Abraham." Here we meet the same problem which troubled Job: how can God permit trouble to come to the righteous? And the answer here is the same as in the case of Job: it is for their strengthening. It startles us, however, to see the word "tempt" applied to God, inasmuch as we recall the injunction of James (1: 13-14), "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." But the difficulty is not as great as it seems. The Hebrew word for "tempt" we discover has also the meaning "prove," which is evidently a more correct word for this place (see the Revised Version). It is no doubt true that temptations are used by God to try and to prove our souls, but "the proving is from God, the temptation is from sin" (Lange). (b) Abraham's trial quite possibly arose out of circumstances about him. He was desirous of offering to God the most complete service possible, and it may be that the human sacrifices which he saw made by the peoples around him to their gods made him wonder if he would be willing to perform such an act of sublime self-renunciation (as it might seem) to his God. Certainly he would not want to be inferior to the heathen in his obedience to Jehovah. The idea of human sacrifices has had a wide sweep through history. We learn of it among the Canaanites, among the Moabites and Ammonites later, among the Phœnicians (descendants of the Canaanites) and Carthaginians, the Egyptians

and, in isolated examples, the Greeks. The horror and terribleness of it have only added to its seductiveness. Men have been led into it by the same degraded superstition which made fanatical Hindoos cast themselves beneath the crushing wheels of the car of Juggernaut. The principle of self-sacrifice is at the very heart of religion, but the slaughter of children upon the altar of the gods illustrates the truth that the perversion of the noblest things is always the worst. However, it is not inconceivable that the desire which lay back of the terrible mistake of the Canaanites may have been most noble in some cases. It may very easily have been, then, that "the sight of the Canaanite sacrifices of children must have led Abraham to self-examination, whether he would be strong enough in renunciation and self-denial to do what those heathen did, if his God desired it from him" (Oehler). If this be so it is an illustration of the truth that God uses circumstances about us for the trying of our souls, and that he employs them all in his far-reaching plans. When God's voice called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac it was along the line of thoughts which had already doubtless often arisen in the grand old patriarch's self-sacrificing heart.

2. The severity of the trial. Abraham had been tried in many ways. His whole career had been one of faith. But now the moment had come for the supreme test. We cannot think of anything more severe than that to which he was now exposed. The prospect of his own death would have been mild compared to the thought of slaying Isaac with his own hand. In Abraham self-love was not the strongest emotion, so he must be tried in some other direction. What did he love most? The child of his old age. Along the line of dearest love



the supreme trial always lies. Christ indicates this when he says we must be willing to give up even father and mother for him. The preciousness of the relation between Abraham and Isaac is specially marked throughout. "The command dwells with emphasis on it: 'Thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest.' He takes with him 'Isaac his son;' lays the wood on 'Isaac his son;' Isaac spake unto 'Abraham his father:' Abraham answers, 'Here am I, my son;' and again, 'My son, God will provide.' He bound 'Isaac his son;' he 'took the knife to slay his son;' and, lastly, in the glad surprise at the end, he offers the ram 'in the stead of his son'" (McLaren).

The line of love along which he was tried was also the line of his hopes. Isaac was the son who was to perpetuate Abraham's family and name. Through many years the old patriarch had hoped for the heir, who means so much in the East, and at last to him, hoping against hope, the precious gift was granted. And now these hopes were to be jeopardized. Not only that, but the hopes of the whole human race were trembling in the balance; for it had been promised that through Abraham and his seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, and now God was commanding Abraham, as it might have seemed, to make the fulfillment of these earth-wide hopes impossible. Still more, the truthfulness of God was at stake. He had made a promise in connection with Isaac, and now he was commanding something which, if carried out in full, would make the promise impossible of completion. Truly, as we analyze the special position of Isaac and his special significance to his father (far beyond that of other dearly loved children to their fathers) it appears to be a colossal thing which God asked

of Abraham. How hard it is to give up our children to God, even when he would take them in the gentleness of death! But what would it be if we were asked to brandish the knife of a slayer over them?

3. The meaning of the trial. (*a*) The chief point was not to have Abraham sacrifice his son, but to have him sacrifice his son and keep his faith in God. Suppose at the supreme moment Abraham had looked up to heaven and cried, "Behold, O God, what I am about to do; in obedience to thy will I slay my son, but at the same moment I abjure thee as a God of cruelty in whom I can no more have faith." In that case Abraham would have obeyed God so far as the external act was concerned, but it is evident that the whole virtue of his act would have been destroyed. The obedience which God was seeking was the obedience of faith. It is true that this was required to show itself in an external act; but the external act, great as it would have been, if severed from the internal state, would have had no value in the eyes of God. No external sacrifice ever has any value to him except as it exhibits a really existing faith back of it. Not merely to sacrifice his son, but to sacrifice his son and keep his faith in God was what God sought. When God asks great things of us do we discern what it is behind them that he asks still more? "To subdue the father in the heart, *that* a Roman has done, and calmly signed his son's death-warrant; but to subdue it not with Roman hardness, but with deep trust in God and faith in his providence, saying, It is not hate, but love, that requires this—this was the nobleness, this the fierce difficulty of Abraham's sacrifice" (Robertson). (*b*) Abraham was asked to sacrifice understanding as well as love to faith. He could not possibly see how the requirement of God to slay Isaac

could be answered and God still satisfy his promises to be a friend to Abraham and to bless all the world through Isaac. The elements to be met in the problem seemed absolutely irreconcilable. There was no possibility of understanding the matter. "Human reason might have concluded simply either that the promise was a falsehood or that the command was not from God but from the devil; for the contradiction is evident. If he ought to slay Isaac the promise is of none effect; but if the promise is valid, it is impossible that this should be the command of God" (Luther). The dilemma was complete. But although Abraham could not solve it, he believed God. He trusted more to God's ability to untangle difficulties than to his own ability to foresee the method of disentanglement. What an everlasting lesson on the relations of faith and reason! Faith is believing without understanding. If we understood, it would be no longer faith. Would that when the trial of our faith comes we could see that virtue for us is in acquiescence without insight. (c) Abraham bowed his will to God's—this is the heart of his sacrifice. As a matter of fact, Isaac was not slain, but Abraham's sacrifice was no less valid, because he had shown himself willing to slay Isaac if it were necessary, and that willingness, and not the slaying, was what God required. When Origen offered himself to the persecutors, entreating them to slay him, and was refused, who shall say his service in testimony of Christ was not as fully acceptable to God as though he had been put to death? "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor 8: 12). Sometimes we are puzzled by being thwarted providentially in giving or doing something for God, and we are not always satisfied with God's interfer-

ence. And on the other hand, he sometimes surprises us by letting us go on and do things which we had hoped, in our half-hearted devotion, that he would interrupt. It is not every time that Isaac is saved. But when he is, when the accomplishment of some noble desire is thwarted, we are to remember that after all the chief thing, that which gives excellence to every offering, is the sacrifice of the will to God.

II. *The results of the trial.* It was not for itself, but for something beyond, that God gave the patriarch this tremendous test. Our trials are never for their own sake. Trouble is not meant to end in itself.

1. Abraham's faith was "manifested, confirmed, exercised, and deepened" (Dods). We are taught (Heb. 11:19) that the special content of Abraham's faith was that he accounted "that God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead." Such a thing had never been thought of before in history, so far as we can see. It was an original conception with Abraham. He expected to have the slain Isaac restored again to life. Such seemed to him the only possible solution of the dilemma of the situation. But to believe in (what must have seemed to him) so nearly impossible a solution required quite as much faith as to believe blindly, without even a guess as to the way out. Abraham's faith was complete; as high as we can conceive faith to be. He believed in God's wisdom and love, even when such a terrible sacrifice was asked. He believed still in the fulfillment of God's promises, although it might require such a miracle as could hardly be imagined. And he came out of this trial with a better faith than ever. It was better because it was strengthened by having had strain put upon it, because it was now a demonstrated rather than a latent faith, because

it had accomplished the willing of a supreme sacrifice, which willingness before could only have been surmised. Abraham's faith had always been justified to him, but no such mighty justification as this had ever been given it before. Now he could do anything, for faith could not go beyond this.

2. God was vindicated as Abraham's friend and the keeper of promises. As Abraham went up the mountain with Isaac God's friendship with him was severely tested, but it stood the strain, and it was shown to be genuine. God did not ask of him anything unreasonable or unkind; having set a duty before him he did not fail to give Abraham strength to perform it, having brought him into a most difficult and harrowing situation he did not abandon him and leave him helpless. He supplied all he asked, he opened ways out of all difficulties he permitted to come. Abraham was justified now more than ever in believing in the friendship of God. Sometimes we do not know what a friend we have in our Father until our road leads us to some mountain-top of severe sacrifice.

3. All of this wonderful story must have had meaning to Isaac. He was not a child, but a young man, able to carry the heavy wood for the altar up the mountain-side. What his feelings must have been as he saw the father's knife raised above him we do not know. But throughout the whole episode his conduct was characterized by the spirit of quiet endurance. He submitted to be bound, he submitted to lie upon the altar. He believed in his father, and in his father's God, and by his submission showed himself a not unworthy heir of "the friend of God," and not unfit to transmit his influence to ages following.

4. An incidental lesson from God's interruption of the

sacrifice of Isaac must not be overlooked. If it had been true that the custom of offering human sacrifices to the gods had suggested to Abraham the question whether he was willing to do as much for Jehovah, and God followed up the line of this thought in testing Abraham's faith, then his forbidding Abraham at last to slay his son showed that He did not wish to have human sacrifices offered to Him. These horrid rites were barbaric, superstitious, not truly religious. And by the remembrance of Abraham's stayed hand his descendants were to know that God wanted the sacrifice of the heart, and not those of precious children's lives. "Nothing is so remarkable a proof of a divine and watchful interposition as the deliverance from the infirmity, the exaggeration, the excess, whatever it is, to which the noblest minds and the noblest forms of religion are subject. . . Abraham reached the very verge of an act which, even if prompted by noble motives and by a divine call, has by all subsequent revelation and experience been pronounced accursed. At that moment his hand is stayed; and the Patriarchal religion is rescued from this conflict with the justice of the law or the mercy of the gospel" (Stanley).

5. It has always been remarked that there is something suggestive of Christ in this Abrahamic episode. Who could mistake the thought that the ram caught in the bushes was the substitute for Isaac? All the subsequent system of sacrifices received interpretation from this scene. The sheep and goats were not slain for their own sake, but were sacrificed in lieu of men. And at last all sacrifices are summed up in that on the cross. To this all others point. And in this respect, as in others, Abraham and Christ are connected.

The great lesson for all of us in the sublime story of

the sacrifice of Isaac is the ultimate blessedness of the trying of our faith. The test may be severe, but "Jehovah jireh." "God sets some strong trial upon a strong Christian, made strong by his own grace; and by his victory makes it appear to the world that the invincible grace, the very Spirit of God, dwells in the hearts of true believers" (Leighton).

## SELLING THE BIRTHRIGHT.

GEN. 25: 27-34.

THE position which Esau took with respect to his birthright was a continuing of the line of cleavage between those who were to carry out God's special aim in history and those who were to have only a passive relation to it. Separation for a purpose—this was the law governing the religious development of the ancient world. "The patriarchal history began with the separation of Abraham the Shemite from the mass of the nations; it continued with the separation of the son of promise from Abraham's other progeny; it closes with a fresh separation made between the twin sons of Isaac" (Delitzsch). The separation of Abraham was brought about through a supernatural revelation and command. The separation of Jacob was secured through the use of natural means: through the operation indeed of human weaknesses, even through the sins of men. The study of how God worked through Jacob and Esau, allowing their special traits, developing into characteristic acts, to accomplish his far-reaching designs, is most striking to us, for it is in the same unobserved way that God works through us, separating us by allowing us to separate ourselves, that we may at last serve his ends.

1. The *characters* of Jacob and Esau are vividly set before us. We cannot mistake what manner of men they were. Esau was a sportsman, fond of life in the open air, impulsive and generous, thinking only of the moment, quick to satisfy immediate desires without much thought



of the final cost of so doing, affectionate and unsuspecting. Jacob was an "amiable" man (a "plain" man, as the authorized version has it), who preferred the quiet humdrum of tent life rather than the exciting and dangerous exposure of the chase; a thoughtful, cautious, farsighted man, looking to the issue of things rather than to their present and temporary aspect, caring little for the wants of the body and the gratification of chance desires, shrewd, and capable of a business-like success.

Doubtless natural temperament had much to do with this difference between the two men. But we cannot help suspecting that the training which they had received from their parents, and the conscious or unconscious influence of the parents upon them, were also potent causes at work to make these sons what they were. It has often been pointed out that there is a singular coincidence between Isaac's love of venison and Esau's craving the mess of pottage. Father and son set more than usual store, it would seem, by the kind of food which pleased them. Isaac had a special fondness for Esau; why? Because of unusual excellences of character? Because of some praiseworthy act which Esau had done? Not this alone. "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison" (v. 28). Of course there was no harm in Isaac's liking one kind of food rather than another. And it was certainly an act of lovely filial thoughtfulness for Esau to gratify his father's taste. Yet does it not strike one as strange that the gratification of a special appetite, of no great consequence one way or the other, should have been the ground of a father's special liking for a son? Ought not a father's approbation to rest upon something deeper than a son's gratification of the father's trivial and fleshly tastes? Ought the father to set so high an estimate as this upon

his own likes and dislikes with respect to food? It is not surprising after asking such questions to see that Esau on his part went a step farther than Isaac and made his peculiar taste for food the dominating thing in his whole life. The father's more or less excusable weakness (if weakness it were) has developed to a passion in his child. In Jacob, on the other hand, we are able to see the mother's influence. For that "watchful cunning" which is the least admirable of his traits had its fullest exercise under the immediate instigation of Rebekah (chap. 27:6, etc.) If she was capable of so great a deceit, and Jacob was capable of such immediate acquiescence in it, we cannot but think that lesser deceits and similar experiences had gone before. The partiality of these parents, never justifiable, never wise, was much to blame for the kind of men their boys turned out to be.

2. *Good and evil* combined were found in the character of each of these brothers. Esau was not the heir of the promise, and yet he was not wholly a bad man; he had many admirable traits. Jacob was the heir of the promise, and yet he was not the lofty-minded and spotless person we might have expected and hoped him to be. Esau was a lover of the things of this life. If he was hungry it seemed that he would die if he did not instantly have something to eat (v. 32). And to satisfy his longing for a dish of red lentils he would sacrifice all large hopes for the future. Yet with this sordid love of the things of sense Esau combined surprisingly something of the highest of the virtues—love. He was touchingly thoughtful for his father's weaknesses, he was forgiving even towards the brother who by means of a trick had snatched away the father's blessing from him. In spite of his shortcomings there is something lovable in Esau.

And admirable as Jacob is in some of the great scenes of his life, much as we are impressed with his aspiration after the things that are eternal, still we cannot but feel it necessary to deduct something from the sum of his excellences when we remember his impatience with conditions as he found them, his lovelessness towards his own brother, his scheming to get surely for himself what he ought to have believed would become his in due time providentially, his trading upon another's folly, his insisting upon an oath in order that there might be no loop-hole of escape; in short, his bargaining spirit, where we might have expected something of magnanimity. "In these two the good and evil are so mingled that at first we might be at a loss which to follow, which to condemn" (Stanley). Herein we see the truthfulness of this history to human nature. The worst criminal we know is not without some spark of good within the heart. Some of the most dramatic and touching episodes of literature are the exhibitions of unexpected affection or courage in those whose lives have been stained with the blackest sins. And the holiest saint never thinks himself to be beyond the need of daily repentance. Even in the serene and lofty character of Abraham we can find unworthy elements, and in Paul, the great advocate of the necessity of faith in new covenant times, we see a constant humiliation for sins. In the combination of evil in Jacob and Esau we ought to find both encouragement and warning.

3. Character is *developed and revealed* by passing events. The two brothers appear before us each possessed of mingled traits of good and evil. They are placed in certain special situations. And these brought into combination with the pre-established traits produce certain results, which in turn react upon those traits. Ac-

cording as men are inclined to fatalism or to a belief in the unrestrained freedom of the human will they take one of two positions concerning the relation of events to character. The fatalist thinks that men are helpless before events, that character is inevitably shaped by them in certain unavoidable ways, that men can no more help making the choices they do than they can prevent the sun from rising. The man who thinks the only truth we know is that the will is free holds that we can impose our choice upon events and make of them what we will, that we are not at their mercy but that they are at ours, that we can be precisely what we want to be and nothing can hinder us.

Although these two positions are irreconcilable so far as our understanding is concerned, yet no doubt the truth is found in the seemingly impossible combination of both. Both Jacob and Esau were creatures of circumstance, having their lives shaped by very slight events, and yet they had characters which they brought to circumstances, and under the influence of their own dispositions they freely made choices which had unlimited consequences. For all of us there is this constant interplay between character and circumstance, the solution of which is most baffling. But there is a solution, which is to trust in God. He can control events, and he also can work in us to will and to do. He is the third term in which we find an escape from the ever perplexing problem of the relations of character and events, of tendency and circumstance, of will and fate. It was a comparatively insignificant matter that Esau being hungry should receive food from Jacob. But in the event we have a full revelation of the weaknesses of the two—Esau's love of the things of this life, and Jacob's cunning. The combination of circumstances

did not make them what they were, and yet it developed what was in them and gave it opportunity, and so confirmed it. So we are always going out into life, giving and at the same moment getting. Character is always bestowing of itself, and always receiving somewhat. If Esau and Jacob had been thinking of God at that moment, and asking him for guidance, they might have directed the event for their mutual happiness, and have each taken from it progress in character.

4. The *ultimate distinction* between these men comes out in the course of time. There was good in Esau as well as evil, there was evil in Jacob as well as good, but in Jacob the good more and more preponderated, and we can see at last that he was not an unworthy heir of the promises. Jacob was truly, and all the time, the better man of the two. For the right principle had the better hold on Jacob and his tendency was upward, whereas Esau was hopelessly committed to the choice of what was selfish and unworthy, and his tendency was therefore away from the good.

If we were judging of these brothers at the moment of this episode we would be very apt to make a mistake. There is something so frank, spontaneous and impulsive about Esau that criticism is almost disarmed. Whereas the calculating eagerness of Jacob to make the most of his brother's distress hardly strikes us favorably. But if we looked only at these superficial traits how far we should be from estimating these men aright; for after all Esau was undeserving and Jacob was one of God's noblemen. Surely we ought not to judge our fellow men, but rather leave judgment to Him to whom alone it belongs, who is the sole searcher of hearts. We should be too lenient toward Esau if we did not see that he was a self-

ish man, of anything but high desires. As the eldest son of the family, in the line of a great blessing, living in the atmosphere of a saintly lineage, he might have been expected to have high hopes and holy desires. The blood that coursed through his veins was the blood of that family through which Jehovah had promised to bless all the nations of the earth. What a glory to be connected with such a sublime historic enterprise, the greatest of all earthly history! But Esau cared nothing for this. He liked hunting and he liked eating, and with these he was content. For the sake of a dish of food he did not hesitate to sacrifice his birthright. The enormity of this selfish and unworthy deed can be understood only when we remind ourselves of what the birthright was; namely, a double portion of the father's inheritance, the chieftainship of the family, and the title to the blessing of promise, which included possession of Canaan and a peculiarly intimate fellowship with Jehovah (see Keil). Esau cared nothing for these things. He thought only of the present, and even of that not in a noble way. He liked food, and for food he would sell the best and holiest hopes. No wonder he is called "profane" (Heb. 12:16). Jacob on the contrary, with all his failings, had a high appreciation of his position as the son of one of God's chosen servants, and he looked with longing hope to the accomplishment of all those glorious promises which Jehovah had granted to his chosen ones. Esau was a man of the sordid present. Jacob lived under an ampler sky, his tendency was upward, he had an ear for the voice of God, he believed in the future, he was an idealist. Even his cunning was exerted in the interest of worthy aims. He made the mistake, so often made still, of fancying that the end justifies the means. He wanted good to come, but for this he

thought it necessary that he should stoop to do evil. He was helping Jehovah along in his plans, but he forgot that God does not need our sins in order to accomplish his purposes. Jacob himself must have seen the futility of his scheming at last. "He got no benefit by it. It did not alter his position for the better in the least. It was not upon Esau's having voluntarily bartered away the birth-right that his deprivation of it by Isaac rested; nor did Jacob himself ever venture to make that barter the basis of his claim" (Hanna). It was not necessary that Jacob should assume the burden of bringing about the accomplishment of Jehovah's promises—that was not his work. And under no circumstances was it right for him to sin against his brother. He was over-anxious for the right. But notice that it was the right after all. The things which Jacob loved were infinitely above those which attracted Esau, and the longer Jacob lived the better he became, doubtless just through the influence of these purifying hopes. "While one recoils from this craftiness and management, one cannot but admire the quiet force of character, the indomitable tenacity, and, above all, the capacity for warm affection and lasting attachments, that he showed throughout" (Dods). "This is no character to be contemned or scoffed at; if it was encompassed with much infirmity, yet its very complexity demands our reverent attention; in it are bound up, as his double name expresses, not one man but two; by toil and struggle Jacob, the Supplanter, is gradually transformed into Israel, the Prince of God; the harsher and baser features are softened and purified away; he looks back over his long career with the fulness of experience and humility" (Stanley).

5. *The rewards were according to the deserts in the*

case of these men. We must not judge of any man's life by one act. If all we considered of Peter's career was the moment of his denial of Christ we should not know the true Peter at all. A man's life has excellence according to its tendency (for no life has perfect excellence or perfect badness). Esau's selling of his birthright was along the line of his selfish downward tendency, and Jacob's longing for the blessing of God (in spite of his mistaken idea of how best to secure it) was along the line of his noble tendency upward. Because of this divergence of tendency in the heart Esau justly lost the inheritance which Jacob justly obtained.

6. *God's purpose was accomplished* in spite of Jacob's sinful interference with it. In any case God would have secured his design. He would have brought it about in some unknown way if Jacob had not interfered. And although he did interfere God secured it just the same. Even our sins do not prevent him, but somehow help on what they might seem to thwart.



## JACOB AT BETHEL.

GEN. 28 : 10-22.

It was necessary for Abraham to be separated from his fellowships at Ur of the Chaldees in order that he might develop according to the wish of God, and be used for the purposes of God. The life of the quiet, easy-going Isaac was like a time of restful growth rather than a period of advance through turmoil and struggle. But with Jacob God resumes the method which was used in the case of Abraham. There must be a new separation, and a new line of battling against difficulties. Life in the individual and in the whole people of God seems to be an oscillation between seasons of peace and seasons of warfare against troubles. The household of Isaac was plainly not the best scene for Jacob's preparation for his share of the patriarchal scheme. Jacob's own error is the means of accomplishing the design of God. By his folly with respect to Esau home is no longer possible to him, and he is forced out into the wilderness. But God is there, and the separation is for blessing.

1. The *man* and his *circumstances* must be understood in order to an adequate comprehension of the deep meaning of the scene at Bethel.

He was *undeserving* of any such exalted blessing. It is true he had (what Esau lacked) some appreciation of the splendor of the future blessings God had promised should come in the line of the patriarchs. But he lacked faith in God's ability to accomplish the fulfilment of those promises unaided by human interference. He had not

learned the sublime lesson of his grandfather's life—to hope against hope, to trust God without seeing, to obey simply and fully, letting God take care of the rest. Consequently he had been led into sin against his father, his brother, and his God. The exile in which he found himself was well earned. It was hard for him to be away from the mother who had loved him well, but not wisely, and whose face he was never to see again; to be at enmity with his brother; to be poor, friendless, ignorant of what the future was to bring him in an unknown land. But these things were not an excessive retribution for what he had done. The stone was not a whit too hard for that sinning head. He had made his own bed by his folly, and must now sleep in it. Yet to this undeserving man God gives the sweetest comfort. To him, who had followed the most selfishly earthly ways of getting what he wished, the heavens were opened and the rarest visions were granted. To him, who had been a very loveless brother, the love of God was granted. He was alone, but companions were found for him above. He was defenceless, but the power of the Almighty was round about him. He who had failed to be gracious found grace. Not according to his conduct was the unusual blessing which came to him in the lonely night. God had compassion upon him and dealt with him not according to his sins.

The *unfavorableness* of the situation was God's opportunity. His omnipotence is shown in his accomplishing his plans in the absence of adequate environment and preparation. Jacob's heart had not been in such a state that a revelation from heaven to him might have been expected reasonably. He had not been spending time in meditation on his sins, in penitence, in appeals to the mercy of God, in communion with the Almighty, in hum-

ble acts of faith. It is one of the signs of God's power that he is able to come into human hearts and reveal truth to them even when they have made no preparation for it. He can use the most refractory medium for the conveyance of his truth. Nor was the absence of Jacob from a specially sacred place any ground of difficulty to God in the conveying of a heavenly vision to the patriarch. Back in the land of Canaan were many sacred places where God had appeared in times past, where he was still specially worshipped, and where it might be expected not unreasonably that he would give glimpses of his presence. But the lone spot where Jacob lay was not consecrated ground. He had no thought that God could there speak directly to him. He doubtless knew that God was everywhere, but he did not expect God to appear except at some holy place. But God is not bound by laws of time and space. A prison cell may be the scene of his blessing as easily as a church. The desert may reveal him as splendidly as the quiet home with its altar of worship.

2. The *vision* attracts our attention as one of the most remarkable ever granted to man.

Its message to Jacob was that of *the fellowship of God and man*. The ladder or staircase (perhaps a winding structure, such as we see represented in pictures of the tower of Babel) spanned the whole long stretch from heaven to earth. Its foot came to that very spot where Jacob lay. Its top reached to the stars, to the habitation of the Almighty. Spatially Jehovah may have seemed a far-off being to Jacob, morally and spiritually he must have seemed so too. But the separation was imaginary. God himself henceforth forbade the idea by this special revelation of its contradiction. Here is one of God's

great historic attempts to impress on the human heart the truth that he is not far from us, but near. Often and often the attempt was repeated, reaching its culmination in the visible appearance here on earth of the incarnate Son of God, who is Immanuel, God with us. But men find it hard still to think of God as actually in fellowship with men. The ladder seems to be taken away, heaven appears far off, God is like an alien to the human heart. We can come into close communion with men, but can we draw as near to God? The ladder with the angels was meant to impress the affirmative upon the mind of the undeserving Jacob, and through him upon the heart of the whole undeserving human race forever. God is always in the closest association with us.

The *omnipresence of God* is also emphasized by this vision. This is like the thought of his fellowship with us, but it is not quite the same. Jacob knew that God could come into fellowship with certain men at certain times and in certain places. But he did not think of this as being possible everywhere and always. The omnipresence of God, *per se*, he could not have been ignorant of, but he needed to know what he did not suspect, that God's fellowship with man is omnipresent. The ladder between heaven and earth rests not only upon the shrines, the sacred pillars, the places of prayer, but it rests upon every spot of earth—upon the desert as well as the populous land. We can never get away from God, even though we should take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea. But what we must remember most of all is that we can never get away from the fellowship of God. He is with us always, but always as a friend. We may not accept his friendship. Indeed we may harden our hearts against it and repudiate it utterly, and wander

wilfully away in spite of it into sin. But God yearns over us just the same, longs to have us turn from our evil doings, is waiting to give himself to us graciously as a companion and helper. In our ingratitude and stupidity we may not enjoy the love of God, but nothing can separate us from it, for God is everywhere, and God is everywhere love.

3. The *promise* given to Jacob is an essential supplement to the vision.

*The land was not strange to God*, if it was strange to Jacob: "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed" (v. 13). Sometime perhaps we have been wandering away from a locality well known to us, and have lost our way. We have stopped and scanned the place where we have found ourselves and have seen nothing to guide us. Yet as we have waited in hesitation something has convinced us that it was not an altogether unknown place to us, and gradually it has looked more familiar, until at last we have been able to think where we were, and have found ourselves near our home when we least thought it. It seems as though some such feeling must have come over Jacob as he listened to the voice of God. He had lain down to sleep there alone, in a strange place. He had been awakened to find himself on his own domain, within the territory which belonged to him and his seed forever. Life is full of strange experiences. Every day brings something new and unexpected to us. Often we feel lost. But God is never lost, nor are these events strange or new or unexpected to him. He is everywhere in time and place. No land is foreign to him. No event is novel to him. All things are ours, whether things present or things to come, for all are God's; and God gives himself to us. God's promise to Jacob made the strangest

place a home. God's promise to us gives us the mastery of every experience and makes it ours for our blessing.

The accomplishment of God's promise is *not affected by circumstances*. At the moment when Jacob received these words he seemed in the most unlikely position to ever witness their fulfillment. He was going away from the promised land, he saw no indications of his being the patriarchal father of nations. There is a striking similarity between his situation at receiving the promise and Abraham's at receiving the same promise two generations before. Natural indications were all against the verification of God's pledge to Abraham. The same was true of Jacob. It seems as though the Lord chose just such moments to reveal his most far-reaching purposes. He vindicates in this way his omnipotence, his independence of events, while at the same time he tries the faith of his servants. Many a time we are unable to see how God can help us. It seems almost useless to remind him of his promises when insuperable obstacles appear to estop him from doing anything. Yet always the event comes out according to his word, his supremacy is at last asserted, our hopes are shown not to have been unreasonable, our faith is amply justified. God's promise to Jacob at this most unpropitious time is of a piece with his dealings with his people always. The darkest hour, the very hour of failure, is the time God selects for making the most stupendous promises. Blessed is he who can believe Him, who can have faith when the sight of the eyes is utterly against it.

God gives his blessing to the world often *through narrow souls*. Jacob was no such man as Abraham. The sublime, unquestioning, unwavering trust of the "Friend of God" was hardly reproduced in the crafty Supplanter. Faith was in him, to be sure, but not in such unqualified

purity. He does not charm, and subdue, and exalt us, as we contemplate him, in the way in which we are moved at the remembrance of Abraham. Yet God worked through Jacob in spite of his failings, He used him in the lime of the promise, He was not hampered by his limitations. God might do all of his work, as he does part of it, through the angels of light. But no, he will show his glory more extraordinarily by employing what seem to be refractory implements. He will take men, weak and sinning, will purify them more and more, and even while they are but indifferent objects of admiration, morally or spiritually, will employ them to the glory of his name. His grace loves to find in unlikeliest spots a home. He takes of the things that are despised, that are naught, to do wonders. To show us that the sufficiency is all of God, he will choose even the lowest sinner as the object of his grace, and through him (a wonderful paradox) will turn many to righteousness. If only the Abrahams were used by the Lord, and the Jacobs were left at one side unemployed, few would there be who could hope to be channels of God's blessings to the world.

To Jacob there was given a *special promise* for this special time. The promise to Abraham, the continuous everlasting promise, is supplemented graciously by a new one, meant for just this hour of need. "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (v. 15). The fugitive Jacob, not equal to such unsupported faith as Abraham's, might have found it hard in his loneliness to feel the sureness of God's promise to and through him. He must have been completely reassured by this special promise. He was not alone, as he

thought, for God said he was with him. He was not in any danger in the unknown future, for God would keep him. He need not fear to go into exile, for God would go with him and bring him back, and accomplish at last everything that was promised. To Jacob's trembling faith God accommodated himself most touchingly by this new promise, with its many explicit specifications. And to us, who feel the lack of the exalted faith of Abraham, God also accommodates himself. We cannot be just like any one else, but God can be to us just a little different from what he is to any one else. He is gracious to all, but he is also gracious to each. He is our God, but he is also my God.

4. The *effect* upon the man of the disclosure of this vision and the utterance of these promises is to be noted.

He *recognizes God* as never before. The consciousness that God had been with him there all the time, while he had been unaware of it, humbled him with a profound feeling of reverential awe. The place was to him thenceforth holy, and to mark it he set up in it a consecrated pillar, after the fashion of the time. The reaction of the heart of Jacob in view of this experience shows after all that underneath his weakness he was a true man of God. It is not by the revelations of divine truth which a man has had that you can estimate him, but by the way in which he has been affected by them. Some men receive much and are little moved; others receive little with the greatest consequences.

Jacob answers God's goodness by *setting his trust* upon Him. It is true there is an "if" in his response to Jehovah. Yet "to find anything mercenary in this vow is to misunderstand it. It is his response to God's promise" (Dods). As well as he knows how, and with the fullest



offering of soul which he can command, he accepts the promise of God and pledges his faith to it. What more could any man? Do we as much?

Some *return* Jacob justly feels is due to Jehovah from him for this gracious experience. In what form shall it be? He will do three things: he will have Jehovah for his God, will worship him there at Bethel, and will serve him with his substance (v. 22). Jacob was not one to take, and give nothing. In the things he designates and in the order in which he names them he shows insight into what is proper religiously from man to God. Worship, true worship, befits him first of all. But the offering of gifts is not thereby made unnecessary.

If we look to Jesus Christ we shall see in him the fulfilment of Jacob's vision (John 1:15). He is the mediator between God and man. He is thus the response to our every need, our comfort in every hour. Doubtless we are unworthy of knowing him. But God has chosen us to receive this revelation. Let us receive it in joy, and honor God in view of it with our worship and our gifts.

## A BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS.

GEN. 18:17-21.

GOD indicated Abraham's mission to him many times. The substance of all these communications is the same. Yet each has special lessons from the circumstances under which Abraham received it, and each has slight variations from the others which give it individual value as a subject of study. We never rise from the consideration of any one of the various indications to Abraham that he was to be the father of many peoples and a source of blessing to the whole world without carrying away some peculiar lesson, which does not come to us through the consideration of any one or all of the parallel passages. If it occurs to us that substantially the same revelation was made to the patriarch a surprising number of times, close investigation will convince us that not one of these was or is superfluous.

The passage, Gen. 18:16-33, is part of the story of Sodom. The purpose of this particular part is to show Abraham's relation to Sodom, or rather Sodom's relation to Abraham. As soon as we are told that the angels whom Abraham had entertained departed from him toward Sodom we are permitted to hear Jehovah soliloquizing, and reminding himself of the noble destiny which he had arranged for Abraham. Why should this apparently extraneous matter be introduced here into the story of Sodom? Because it is most immediately relevant, instead of being, as it looks, irrelevant. Abraham is chosen of God to be the means of blessing the world by lead-

ing it to righteousness. To impress upon him and his descendants the fact that righteousness is the end for which he has been called, God's unchanging attitude towards unrighteousness is exhibited in the story of Sodom. The narrative of the destruction of this city, which brings out with intense brilliancy the fact that God is just and deals with men according to their deserts, and will in no wise spare the wicked, this narrative is a sort of foot-note to the covenant with Abraham, showing unmistakably the end for which it was made.

But it is more than this: it serves to show one way in which the covenant that Abraham and his children were to be a blessing to all the world was to be fulfilled. For the story of Sodom exhibits Abraham as an intercessor for others in their sins, and this intercessorship is a perpetual element in the method by which his descendants are forever to be a means of uplifting to the world. It is evident, therefore, that the episode about Sodom comes in at this point not extraneously, but as a remarkably telling comment upon the covenant with Abraham.

The interest of that covenant to us is not chiefly historic (although that kind of interest is included), but directly personal. We do not care for that divine arrangement so much in its bearings on Abraham as in its bearings upon us. For we are, as Paul tells us repeatedly, Abraham's children by reason of our faith, which joins us to him. The covenant made with him is, then, as valid to us as though we had heard Jehovah speaking the words with our own ears. We ought, therefore, to apply the terms of that covenant to ourselves, to try our lives by its conditions, to rejoice in the outlook which it gives, and to depend as completely upon God's fulfilling it as did Abraham.

1. *A knowledge of God's plans* was in some degree involved in that covenant. "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" (V. 17.) "Abraham is the friend of God, an appellation which has become among Moslems a surname to his name; and from a friend we keep nothing secret" (Delitzsch). The world as a whole knew not God's purposes for it. Only inferentially could it rest upon the thought of his beneficence. But Abraham knew, and was commissioned to tell it, that God meant to bless the world; that his purposes were those of kindness.

In Christ we are adopted into the family of God, and are let into the family secrets. We learn that, following out the promise made to Abraham, God is still planning great blessings for men, and that the plan has come nearer to completion than ever before in Jesus Christ. It is God's gracious design that all men shall hear the good news of salvation by the cross of the dying Son of God. It is his intention that the news of this, the gospel, shall spread throughout the whole earth, winning souls to itself, until, by faith in the Redeemer, righteousness and peace shall abide everywhere, and the knowledge of the Lord fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

2. Assurance that *God himself had chosen him* to this end was given to Abraham. "For I have known him" (v. 19). The word know is used here in the sense in which it occurs in Amos 3:2: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth;" where it refers plainly not to mere cognition, but to choice. It is easily seen that Abraham did not choose his mission for himself. He did not think it out, elaborate it, construct it out of his own wants, impulses and imaginings. God called him. The inception of the matter was in the mind and

will of Jehovah. God wanted an instrument for the accomplishment of a specific historical intention which he had in thought, and he chose Abraham as that instrument. It may be said truthfully, no doubt, that Abraham was a man of natural religiousness. But if he had raised his natural religiousness to the highest power conceivable it would not have been the same as that direct call of God which marked him for a definite divine purpose by its supernatural character.

The idea that Abraham's spiritual successors are also called of God runs all through the New Testament. That word which we so unwisely and wrongly neglect to-day, "elect," was one of the commonest names in the early church for those who belonged to Christ. They loved to think that they had not chosen him, but he had chosen them, and called them out of darkness, out of their Ur of the Chaldees, into his marvellous light. And the same thing may and ought to be said of Abraham's spiritual successors always. If we are Abraham's children, by reason of our faith in Christ, then we are the called of God.

3. *The purpose of his being called* was not obscure to Abraham. It was that he might become the progenitor of a mighty nation, and through himself and them be a means of blessing to all the nations of the earth, by teaching all "to keep the way of the Lord," that is, by teaching true religion (vs. 18, 19). Abraham was not called arbitrarily for the purpose of being called, but for a purpose definite, far-reaching, beneficent, glorious. He was chosen as an instrument to serve a certain purpose in the mind of another. God picked him up for a certain work, as a carpenter might pick up a tool.

Those forever who are Abraham's seed are also cho-

sen for a purpose, the same purpose indeed, the propagation of true religion; "the keeping of the way of Jehovah," in the world. We are good tools only as we serve the end of Him who has taken us up in his hand for work. To spread God's good news all around the world is the reason why he called us and made us specially his own.

4. *Along natural lines* Abraham was taught this work was to be done. The family was to be the medium through which true religion was to be propagated. He was to "command his children and his household after him" to keep the way of the Lord (v. 19). It is true, Judaism always had an eye to those who were outside its pale. The doors were always open to them if they desired to become incorporated among God's people. But the strength of Judaism lay in the family and national ties. Along the natural line of blood relationship the true religion spread.

Christianity, which is the heir of the Abrahamic covenant, has its eye also towards all the nations of the world. It tells them all of the love of God in Christ, and urges them with all the power at its command to accept that gracious love. Yet, glorious as the achievements of the missionary field are, the strength of Christianity is in the home. To-day, more than ever before, we need to emphasize this, because to-day the old home-life seems to be departing. The pressure of a thousand interests so absorbs the time, thought, and energy of father and mother, and children too as they grow in years, that home becomes little more than a boarding-house, whose nurture is only the indirect influence of one character upon another. Abraham learned that the family was a place for direct and definite teaching. It was a school. Is it so now? The law of the propagation of the true religion

laid down by God still holds good. The purpose for which we were chosen is largely that we should lead our children to God in Christ.

5. *Righteousness* was to be the practical result in conduct of the working out of the covenant by Abraham and his children. "To do justice and judgment" (v. 19) explains in large part what is meant by keeping the way of the Lord, i. e., true religion. In time, by the direct suggestion of God, ritualism came into Jewish life. It had its dangers and its degenerative influence upon vital religion. But there never failed to be prophets to warn Israel, to remind them that ritualism was not a substitute for conduct, to call them back to Abraham's understanding of religion.

The ethical side of Christianity must never be forgotten. This is not all there is to Christianity. We cannot agree, for instance, that Christ's only relation to his Father was ethical (as Wendt supposes). Jesus was the Son of God in another sense than by moral resemblance. And if we are God's children we are so mystically, being adopted by him soul-wise as we adopt earthly children body-wise, without respect to character. And yet character is involved, and necessarily. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Abraham's children are to be recognized by their doing the deeds of righteousness. Everywhere and always we are to tell of faith in Christ as the sole means of salvation, adoption into God's family; and everywhere and always we are to accompany this with the truth that those who are God's children must show it in godlike lives. We believe unto righteousness.

6. *The ethical end of the covenant was emphasized* to Abraham by the episode of the burning of Sodom. "The destruction of Sodom and the surrounding cities

was to be a permanent memorial of the punitive righteousness of God and to keep the fate of the ungodly constantly before the mind of Israel. To this end Jehovah explained to Abraham the cause of their destruction in the clearest manner possible" (Keil). The covenant in its moral bearings was in this way given a solid historical verification. The memory of the terrible destruction of Sodom could never die out of Israelitish thought. Its meaning was that the only way to escape the just wrath of God is to flee from sin.

This awful object-lesson is not obsolete for us. Sin is as tempting to-day as ever. Many a man could be named who, like some of Abraham's superficial children, has tried to belong to God and still live a selfish, even a sinful, life. The history of the Christian as well as the Jewish church is full of wretched examples of the folly of this attempt. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." To point to the covenant while hugging our darling sins does no good. The covenant is unto righteousness. Without righteousness in view our relation to the covenant is completely nullified. Being saved unto sin is a contradiction in terms.

7. *Abraham's intercessory office* is also brought into prominence by the introduction of the story of Sodom. His persistent pleading for the wicked city exhibits the patriarch as a noble-minded humanitarian. He was to be the source of blessing to the world by teaching his children the way of Jehovah, but meantime he was to seek the blessing of his cotemporaries; he was to bear them on his heart and to pray earnestly for them to God.

Here we see an anticipation of the duty of Christians to pray for all men. In our homes Christianity will have its stronghold. There will be its most vigorous propa-



ganda. Yet while we are to attend to this first indicated way of continuing the blessings of the covenant with Abraham, we must not forget the other method, outside the family, outside of natural lines, of warning all men to fly unto the love of God for salvation, and of interceding with God earnestly for them as Abraham interceded for guilty Sodom.

It is a privilege to live in any age of the world, for of every one of them it may be said, "to be living is sublime." But surely there is special privilege in living in a time when the world-wideness of the covenant of God is so fully appreciated by his people. There have been times in the history of the church when the close-corporation idea seemed to dominate its methods. One has only to read some of the captious reviews of Sargeant's "Life of Henry Martyn" to see how far more fully we appreciate to-day than our grandfathers did early in this century the wide reach which God meant his covenant should have. We know that the whole world is destined for the captivity of Christ.

And yet, if we believe this, if we catch truly with our eye this sublime consummation, what zeal for all missionary work we ought to have; what immense circulation should be credited to all missionary magazines, what large membership there should be in all missionary societies, what colossal offerings ought to go up to the missionary boards, what fervent and unceasing prayers should rise to the throne of the covenant-making God! May Abraham's God give us Abraham's world-feeling in view of the covenant.

## JACOB'S PREVAILING PRAYER.

GEN. 32 : 9-12, 24-30.

THERE are moments in life, which come upon us unannounced, which try the soul to the utmost and determine the final trend of character. Such a moment came to our first parents in Eden when the temptation to sin was presented to them ; it came to Noah when, under a stormless sky, he was bidden to make ready for a flood ; it came to Abraham when he raised the knife over the child of his old age, the heir of the promises of God ; and it came to Jacob at Peniel. There he met the great test of character. He answered it admirably. He came away a new man. Thenceforth he was not the Supplanter, but the Prince of God.

The character of the midnight contest between Jacob and his unknown antagonist has been debated much by commentators. Some have thought it a vision so intense as to be capable of leaving as its reminder the withered thigh. Some have held that the contest was partly visionary and partly real. The unskeptical reader naturally rests in the literal external character of the event all through. It is a matter that needs not to be settled. Certain it is that there was an evident bodily effect from the wrestling. Certain also is it that the meaning of the episode was spiritual. It was not the first not the last time that the spiritual was set forth in the material, and there is no difficulty in supposing that the struggle was a literal bodily wrestling, intended to convey a spiritual truth.

The statement that the stranger "saw that He pre-

ailed not against him" (v. 25) must be understood as an anthropomorphic form of expression. The almighty God permitted this wrestling to go on wholly for Jacob's benefit. It was never for a moment a contest to see who was victor, although Jacob looked at it in that way. God's purpose was secured best by not conquering at once, letting Jacob exert himself to the utmost, and then, when the right moment had come, by producing an instantaneous effect which would give Jacob some idea of who he was.

1. *Jacob's request* must be remembered before we can understand the episode. With some just forebodings as to how Esau would act when he heard of his return, Jacob sent messengers ahead to propitiate him. They had come back without any answer and with the news that Esau was advancing with four hundred men. "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed." And well he may have been. With his family and his rich possessions he was about to enter into Canaan to enjoy that birthright which he had won from Esau by disreputable means. It was hardly to be expected that Esau would permit this without some generous concessions. These Jacob had offered, but the cold return might well make him suspect that Esau intended to thwart him completely and prevent his having what God had promised. To God therefore he fearfully turns, "distressed" doubtless by conscience as well as by dread, reminding God of his patriarchal line of descent, of the explicit promise which God had made when he commanded this very return, confessing his unworthiness of all the mercies God had granted him, and then pointedly asking to be delivered from the hand of Esau. His past shrewdness could avail him nothing at this critical time, and indeed if it could come into play he would

hesitate to use it at the cost of a still greater burden laid upon a guilty conscience. He is driven into a corner, physically and morally, where there is no way out save by the help of the covenanting God. To God therefore he prays. The birthright, won, to be sure, by fraud, but promised afterwards by God himself, is in peril. God hears the prayer, and answers it by leading Jacob through a unique trial, in which Jacob fortifies his possession of the birthright, not by fraud, but by faith. What he had taken by sin he thus secures anew by virtue. Indeed God never rested Jacob's right to the promise upon the deceit practised upon Isaac. That was wholly superfluous so far as the foundation of the inheritance was concerned, and God ignored it. But in spite of that he had made a promise to Jacob, the answer to which seemed about to be undone. Jacob calls (and rightly) for the fulfillment. It will be given, but only after a spiritual revolution in himself has been accomplished.

2. *God must be met*, and his claims answered, and his relation to Jacob settled, before the matter of Esau is concluded. A man who sins against his fellow sins much more against God (Ps. 51 : 4). Back of the creature stands the Creator, and the injuries we do the one reach through to the other. Jacob in cheating Esau had sinned against Jehovah, and for that he must do what every sinful soul must: humble himself in the sight of Heaven. He was looking with dread to the morrow, when the injured brother must be confronted. But before that time, another, more seriously injured than Esau, must be met and the issue tried out with him. It seems impossible not to see, in the wrestling with the Angel, Jacob's being led to a true repentance for his sin. For the wrestling certainly must be looked at in its spiritual consequences, and one of

these was unquestionably a remarkable purification of the heart of Jacob. Such a change involves a deep and hearty turning from his sin. Before this he seems to have been sorry for it, but largely because of the danger of his situation. That sorrow needed to be amplified into a sincere turning from his act, not as having caused certain unpleasant results, but because of its wickedness. The change brought about by his wrestling with God shows that after that Jacob could never have been inclined to such a wretched interference in the accomplishment of God's plans as before.

3. *Jacob's self-sufficiency* had stood him in good place all along until this time. Now it is shown to be utterly inadequate ; it is broken down, and he is led to look elsewhere than to himself and his own craftiness. In his attempt to secure the birthright he had shown great skill in deceiving. In his dealings with Laban he had never been at a loss for a method to get even with Laban in his skillful manipulation of his son-in-law for his interest. When he sent ahead to Esau to propitiate him he felt that he was pursuing a very sharp-sighted course in offering him part of his flocks. The first rebuff came when Esau failed to answer, but instead approached with four hundred men. At once Jacob turns to God for protection, but only because for the moment his skill is not equal to the situation. But he is not yet the man he ought to be. He must be forever emancipated from dependence upon this craft and self-sufficiency as a principle of life. He must learn that, in spite of his successes through this method in the past, it is not equal to the strain which life would put upon it. He must be taught that the right way for him to live before Jehovah is not to take things into his own cunning hands until he finds he

is unequal to them, and then call upon God for help; but to depend always upon God and live in faith and obedience towards him. He has been living on the principle of self-dependence supplemented by divine help once in a while; he must learn to depend on God alone and all the time. As often as he was conscious thereafter of the lameness in his thigh he would be reminded that man cannot live in his own strength.

4. *The change* brought about in Jacob through this wrestling with God was his glorious consciousness of the higher life, the life of faith. He had begun his contest with this strange unknown antagonist trusting in his own ability to extricate himself from the unexpected difficulty. Until the breaking of the day there was no change. Then the touch on his thigh revealing his weakness revealed the supernatural character of his Antagonist. No wonder he could not overcome Him. But instantly awaking to the possibilities of the situation he demands a blessing (v. 26). The desire for a bodily triumph is suddenly supplanted by a longing for a spiritual gift. Awakening into a still deeper understanding of this episode, he desires to know the visitor's name (v. 29); that is, to have a fuller revelation of the character of God. His self-assertiveness, his belief that he was equal to anything, his dependence on his own sharp wits and his own abilities, these had been destroyed. That sudden touch on the thigh had shown him his folly and his helplessness. But at the same moment his longing for spiritual blessing had developed, his insight into the high life of the soul had become clearer, his casting of himself upon God in a supreme act of faith had been accomplished. Thenceforth he was no longer Jacob, the supplanter, the sharp self-dependent man, but Israel, the striver with God, who

by the hard road of disciplinary experience has been led into a just fellowship with the worthies of God's people through all the ages. The change in name stood for a genuine change in the man himself.

5. *His prevailing in what is right* was already an indication that a new personality had awakened within him. Before this he had persisted in self-confidence. Now he pressed hard his demand for a blessing—for a revelation of God. This was precisely what God wanted him to crave and to ask for, and what God wanted to give. He had splendid things in store for Jacob, when his want for them had been aroused. But Jacob had not felt that want in the years when he had been planning his career for himself, and accomplishing it in his own strength. But at last he felt it growing within him, and at once it developed so as to form the main element in his heart. He is thirsty now for God. He wants spiritual blessing. He will struggle for it in repeated and persistent prayer until he receives it. Surely, surely this is a new man. He is not asking now to be protected from Esau. He wants God.

6. *The change in himself reveals God.* At the moment that the stranger who had wrestled with him gave him his new name (the indication of the new character) he also revealed indirectly the fact that he was God (v. 28). Jacob had asked to know the stranger's name. When Jacob finds himself he also finds the answer to the question. It is but another setting forth of the great truth that God reveals himself to us more and more as our character becomes transformed through our faith in him. The man does not find God who starts out to do so with an inflated notion of his own intellectual acuteness: but he does find him who starts out in humble penitence and

faith, seeking God-likeness of character. The pure in heart shall see God. We rightly suspect that there is some connection between their character and their vision. Heaven is a place where we see God as he is, because there we shall be like him. And in as far as we bring heaven into earth, that is, in as far as we live by faith in God and let God renew us in more worthy lives, so far we are able increasingly to know him and to understand what he is like. Jacob's blessing at the hand of God was measured by his capability of receiving. To us God looks and waits all the time to give things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither have entered into the heart of man. But we do not receive them, because we do not let God work in us our spiritual transformation.

7. *Jacob secured the blessing.* In his eagerness for something grand and glorious in this new realm into which he has found himself advancing as the new day dawned, Jacob asks for one thing and then another. Four times he makes his demands, and his persistence is rewarded. For as the Divine One was about to leave "he blessed him there" (v. 30). This persistence, we are taught over and over again in the Bible, is the condition of the answering of prayer. Not as though God was reluctant, for, on the contrary, he is ready to give before we ask. But, on the one hand, only those prayers (and few there be) which persist and survive in undiminished strength amid the apathy and relapse of our ordinary petitions represent truly what we want; and on the other hand this very survival is caused by God, whose Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts suggesting such prayers, for they are those which God intends to grant. Jacob's persistence was not an artificial enthusiasm. He did not deliberate and decide that he would persist. His eyes



had been opened to recognize God, he had been led up to a new level of spiritual experience, and with complete spontaneity and abandon the intense petitions rushed to his lips. He could not help making them, and God answered them. The prayers that we really mean, that come out of hearts roused and ennobled by the uplifting (though hard) experiences which God gives us, these bear on them the sign of heavenly origin and the promise of heavenly reply.

8. *The character of the birthright* was made apparent by this hard but blessed experience. Jacob had thought of it as a matter of lands and progeny and possessions. His earthly conception of it had led him to very earthly methods in his attempts to guarantee it to himself. But he learns that it is a spiritual blessing which God intends to give him, that the land and the progeny and the possessions are but the external symbol and embodiment of something which far transcends them. Abraham from the first seems to have had a strange insight into God's meaning. But he was the friend of God *par excellence*. Jacob had to be educated up to this knowledge, he had to come at it by stern experience. He had no clear and unmistakable understanding of heavenly things. That came to him as it comes to us, through years of work and sin and mistake. But he rejoiced to find it at last nevertheless.

9. *Jacob justified himself as an heir of the promises*, in a certain sense, in this experience. Before this we may have had our doubts, but now we know that at heart he is of the same character as Abraham and Isaac; that he is a man of faith. It was not very apparent at the moment when his anxiety led him to the fraud against Isaac. He seemed then to be wholly unworthy of the birthright after

which he grasped. But God knew what of good was in him. God had chosen him. In due time it would be seen that Jacob was not undeserving of the birthright. God's choice was vindicated. Jacob, mercenary, self-dependent, crafty, comes forth at last penitent, spiritual-minded and full of faith in God. His thigh is withered, his body for ever bears the rebuke of God. But his eyes have seen Jehovah, and the memory of Peniel is compensation for all hardship. May God so purify us of our selfishness, even though it be by hardship, that we may not be unworthy to be heirs of the promise with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

## DISCORD IN JACOB'S FAMILY.

GEN. 37 : 1-II.

THE family is a little world by itself. As we study the group of parents and children we can see the operation of those moral laws which hold over all humanity. Human history is the chronicle of the results brought about by exposing men, endowed each with a special disposition, to special events. Each member of the household possesses a special disposition. Events occur, of one sort or another, which affect each person peculiarly, and each accordingly contributes a special element to the total effect.

Nowhere can we find a more interesting picture of this aspect of family life than in the household of Jacob. Here are widely different dispositions. Events occur. These dispositions are variously affected by them. And all contribute something to the final result in the household group.

1. JACOB, the head of the house, stands before us still, consistently with the idea which we have formed of him before, as a man of good and evil traits combined, working always towards a higher level of life.

His *partiality* is brought prominently before us as one of the elements which he contributed to the family life, and to the family trials also. "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age" (v. 3). It would not be fair to say that if Jacob had been impartial the family would have had no ill-feeling within it, for other causes were at work.

But certainly Jacob's partiality stimulated these other causes, and helped them to their unhappy end. For such parental partiality there is absolutely no excuse. Let any one imagine himself in the place of a slighted child for a moment, and he will see how a just indictment against the parent could be found. To show favor according to moral desert is one thing. But Jacob's partiality for Joseph rested on the fact that he was the child of his old age. And even in treating children according to their deeds care must be taken. For no more in earthly than in heavenly parentage will strict justice win the love of weak or erring hearts. We are to remember that God sends his rain on the unjust no less than on the just. One should never say even to the naughtiest child, "I do not love you now," for it is not true. It is possible to show moral disapproval affectionately.

This partiality Jacob did not hesitate to *exhibit outwardly*, which only served to increase it and to enlarge its evil effects. He made for Joseph "a long garment with sleeves" (v. 3, Rev. Vers.). This long tunic "was worn, as a rule, only by the most noble and opulent classes, by kings' sons and daughters, by priests and scribes, by those who were exempt from manual labor" (Cox). It would have been bad enough if Jacob, looking carefully over his own feelings, had had to confess to himself that (for other than a moral reason) he loved one son better than the rest. But for him to allow that feeling to come to expression, and in such a form as would be certain to cause jealous feelings, was an imprudence incalculably unwise. Father and mother should try to hold all their children equally in their love; certainly they should never give the children any ground for suspecting that they are loved differently by their parents.

*Difficulties already existing* were made greater by this imprudence. Polygamy had come into the world in spite of God's paradisaic object-lesson that a man should have but one wife. Polygamy always carried curses with it. One of the difficulties arising from it was the adjustment of relations between the children of different wives. Here there was a paramount opportunity for the suspicion of favoritism. If Jacob had been perfectly impartial there would have been trouble between the different branches of his household, most likely. This probability was crystallized into a certainty by his partiality for Joseph. Fathers and mothers may well remember that the natural difficulties of a household are sufficiently great without their increasing them by a thoughtless favoritism.

*Too late* Jacob discovered the mistake that was being made, and rebuked Joseph (v. 10) for telling that which increased the ill-feeling of the brothers. But if there was any wrong feeling of selfish exultation in Joseph's heart (which is entirely doubtful) Jacob might better have rebuked himself for it. And even in administering the rebuke he does not seem to feel certain of his ground. He treats the dream somewhat contemptuously, and appears to have felt a touch of personal resentment at the place which he himself occupied in it; and yet he "kept the saying in mind" (v. 11). He knew that there was something wrong somewhere, and yet his moral judgment was confused, for he saw something of the divine hand in the dreams. What a pity that he could not have felt the unhappy condition of his household earlier, when he might have discovered his own share in causing it.

2. JOSEPH appears before us actively for the first time here. We are won by his open, boyish frankness; and yet we cannot help seeing that the years have some-

what to teach him. That wisdom which led him through such appalling difficulties in the years which followed needed yet to be found. "Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers."

His *moral sensitiveness* attracts us first. He was a noble-minded boy, sent out with his brothers to tend the flocks. Ordinarily a youth in similar circumstances would be all ears and eyes to catch ideas from those about him who had seen more of life. He would begin at once to reflect in himself their influence. Joseph's brethren were not men of unselfishness, purity and godliness. Their lives had been stained with crime. By the law of influence Joseph should have become like them. But he did not. He was shocked by their feelings and their deeds, and reported them in horror to his father. We cannot but feel profound admiration for the staunch purity of soul exhibited here. Would that sin might always seem shocking to us!

Joseph's moral sensitiveness, admirable as it was, *expressed itself* in such a way as to cause trouble. He went to his father and related the misdeeds of the brethren, thoughtlessly overlooking the fact that no good could come from it, but that the consequence must be an increase of the strain already put by his father's partiality upon the relations between his brothers and himself. Some hold (with Dods) that Joseph was not necessarily involved in the guilt of tale-bearing; that "the unspecified iniquity of these men may have been of a kind requiring him to speak." But as no good, but only harm, came of his repeating the "scandal" (Delitzsch) what Smith says (Old Testament History) seems more just: "Though the character of Joseph is one of the purest that we meet in Scripture, his father's preference tempted

him to assume towards his brethren the part of a censor and informer—a course of which the modesty was questionable, and the prudence not at all so, in a youth of seventeen.”

His *thoughtless telling of the truth* served to aggravate the unhappy situation still more. There is no doubt that he really had these startling dreams, nor is it unlikely that the Lord directed his mind towards them, and certainly they were just predictions of the future relations between Joseph and his brethren. Nevertheless, if Joseph had been trying to love and conciliate his brethren, to win them to righteousness, and to undo the harm his father's partiality had done, it is inconceivable that he should have told them these dreams, when the telling could serve no good purpose. There are some times when the truth must be told at any cost. This was not one of such. For there are other times when telling everything we know is unnecessary, puts us in a false light, and hurts those feelings in others of which we should be as tender as though they were our own. “Joseph was more of a prophet than a politician, else he would have kept this to himself, when he could not but know that his brethren did already hate him, and that this would but the more exasperate them” (Henry).

Joseph's *unsusceptibility* to the lessons of experience appears in the fact that although his brethren hated him after hearing the first dream (v. 8) he went right on to tell them the second dream and make their hatred still deeper. Unwittingly he was himself preparing the materials of the great catastrophe which was about to fall upon him. And the fact that God overruled it must not blind us to the truth that it was a catastrophe, and that Joseph was more or less to blame for his thoughtlessness which

helped to bring it on. The evident ill-feeling which was evoked by the narration of the first dream ought to have been a warning to him. But he seems to have been so impressed with the revelation of the future given to him that he forgot the duties of the present. The knowledge that he was to rise above the rest of his family obscured for the moment the loving consideration which nevertheless he was under obligation to render them. We cannot very heavily blame Joseph for his boyish unwisdom, but we must not neglect to characterize it aright.

3. The BRETHREN contribute their element in the family difficulty. Jacob was to blame, Joseph was somewhat to blame also, but most of all were these hateful brethren to blame for the wretched state of things set before us, and the more wretched consequences ensuing.

*Jealousy* marked their relations to Joseph all along. From the moment they and he appear before us we discover that they had unkind feelings towards their brother. But then Jacob was partial to him. True, but another's wrong-doing was no defence of theirs. Moreover, Jacob was an old man, and they might have pardoned something to the foibles of age. But then Joseph was so exasperating. True, but he was only a boy, and they were men. He had all of life before him in which to learn that wisdom which they should have learned from the years which were behind them. If Joseph showed lack of consideration for them, much worse was it for them, with their older years, to make capital of that fault and use it for cultivating a like one in themselves. Others' weaknesses are never a just excuse for our own. Every man must bear his own burden of personal responsibility.



This jealousy was *grounded on their own sinfulness*. They were bad men and Joseph was good. He had been sent out to associate with them as toilers and as brethren, but his noble soul had held aloof from their evil doings and sayings. His attitude towards them had been such as to offer standing reproof to their badness. They knew he was better than they, that he was right and they were wrong, and they disliked him for it. They remind us of the man who, voting to send Aristides into exile, on being asked why he did so, replied that he was tired of always hearing him called "the just." The bad feelings which men have towards others are not seldom the unconscious outgrowth of their own sins.

The envy of the brethren was *shown pettishly*. They "could not speak peaceably unto him" (v. 4), literally "they could not say 'peace' to him;" i. e., "could not address him with the wish 'peace to thee'" (Delitzsch), the ordinary form of salutation. What a true picture of human folly this is! Here are men, thousands of years ago, doing just what we have seen men do often to-day: refusing to speak to those of whom they are jealous. The human heart is pretty much the same always. Everywhere we see the same envyings, petty coldness, refusal to speak. The scornful sons of Jacob remind us of some proud woman who, in order to obtain advantage of another whom she suspects of a feeling of superiority, treats her with chilling coldness to show that she is equal to the situation. These trivial ventings of ill-temper would be ridiculous were they not (as in Joseph's case) so fraught with terrible consequence.

*Others' misjudgments strengthened* the jealousy that had begun in the hearts of the brethren. Jacob and Joseph did not act altogether with such discretion as might

have been wished. But they were men, full of weaknesses like others, and the brethren, talking things over together (instead of planning murder), should have made themselves equal to pardoning these misjudgments, especially to a father and brother. But they, on the contrary, fed their jealousy upon them. Where we ought to overlook others' mistakes we not rarely utilize them for the establishment of sinful feelings of our own.

We are not surprised to find these brethren *hardened to truth* as a result of their selfishness. They were prejudiced against Joseph, and so did not discover the hand of God in the marvellous dreams related to them: While Joseph told these in naive simplicity, they suspected that he told them out of pride, in order to enjoy a passing superiority to them. And if we are right in thinking that they suspected there might be some truth in these dreams (because they treated them so seriously), they showed their wilfulness in not heeding that truth, even when it came in startling form to them a second time. Are we not always blinded by our selfish feelings to the truth which God is trying to convey to us through others? Our prejudices often hide the hand of our Father.

The general lessons of the internal life of the Jacobean family cannot be mistaken.

1. Parents are taught the duty of impartiality towards their children. How many a child's heart may be aching at this moment because of a withholding of affection, a lack of sympathetic understanding, a cold neglect by father or mother, while a brother or sister is fondled and petted and appreciated to the utmost. Every child deserves of every parent all the love of the heart.

2. Truth should be held by us in kindness. Some-

times it must be told, but it should be told in love always. Sometimes it need not be told. Then in kindness we must keep silence. Our Lord was sometimes severe in his utterances, but his severity was always prompted by love, and we may believe his gentle words exceeded these in volume. And sometimes he maintained a dignified silence. Whatever we do, or refrain from doing, should be prompted by love.

3. Our imperfections are no ground for envy of better men. It is often said that there is always some one ready to cry down a good man. But we gain nothing by the lowering of the good fame of others. To bring down the stars would not raise us to the skies. The Christian spirit prompts us on the contrary to rejoice in the moral and spiritual achievements of every good man, and to bless God for giving him to the world and us. And the same spirit prompts us always to humility, to esteem others better than ourselves. Joseph's brethren show the spirit of the world, which is the exact opposite in every particular of the spirit of Christ.

4. God used this quarrel in the family of Jacob for good. That did not exculpate the members of it for their weaknesses, misjudgments, and sins. But it shows us how out of the unpromising and refractory material of our lives God can bring the accomplishment of his holy purposes, so that even the wrath of man can be made to praise him. We are to blame for our mistakes, but God's purposes are not thwarted but rather assisted by them.

## JOSEPH SOLD INTO EGYPT.

GEN. 37 : 23-36.

THE frankness of the Scriptures in giving us full knowledge of the weaknesses and sins of those who were, in spite of them, servants of God, has often been remarked. Why have these revelations of moral imperfection been preserved to us, when they are at times so appalling? Surely, to remind us of our own weakness that we may be on the look-out against our own sins, and to remind us also of the power of God's blessed grace, which can use even the feeblest and most unworthy implements for his glorious purposes. But we must never think that our sins are any the less sinful because God is able to over-rule them (Isa. 10 : 7; Acts 2 : 23).

The story of the sons of Jacob selling one of their number into captivity is not pleasant for us to study, but it is wholesome, if it warns us against doing wrong ourselves, by serving as a shocking "vision of sin." We see in it different aspects of evil.

1. *The growth of sin* is exhibited to us here. "Envy passes over to animosity, animosity to fixed hatred, and hatred to a scheme of murder, just as in the history of Cain, and in that of Christ" (Lange). The original seed of sin was already planted in the soil of the patriarchal family life when Jacob showed unwise partiality for one of his sons. Evil feelings between the brothers had already developed. As Joseph goes up to Dothan to secure tidings of the brethren, sin is already in existence in their evil hearts. In what follows we see, not its incep-

tion, but its increase. If we were to study the growth of any sin of our own we should find its origin much farther back than we suppose.

The first new stimulation of the evil passions of the brethren was given by the appearance of Joseph upon the horizon. "They saw him afar off." Why was he coming to them? Was it in kindness or in rebuke? That made no difference. The very sight of him, in his long coat—the always exasperating reminder of their father's preference of him—roused their enmity to the height of passionateness, and "they conspired against him to slay him" (v. 18). "And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren" (v. 23), the matter was settled, and their determination took on the form of action. Between the time when Joseph first appeared and the time when he reached them there was ample opportunity for them to repent of their evil feelings and plans. Conscience, the ties of brotherhood, the reverence of children for a father, all holy and preservative emotions were given to them naturally by God, and there was time for these to have saved them from crime if they had but yielded to them. It is seldom that sin attacks us so completely unawares that an instantaneous decision must be made. Usually there are some moments between the suggestion of it and the instant of action—an interval long enough for the full word of conscience to be heard, and for all God's voices within and without to speak loudly. A dreadfully important crisis is that when the lusts of the heart are calling us one way and the voice of God calls us another. If we will but listen to the voice of God sin is powerless. What makes sin so guilty is that it is committed in resistance to this prevenient opportunity to say No.

The first step of active sin on the part of Joseph's brethren was to strip the favored son of his coat (v. 23). There is something almost ludicrous in this. The coat certainly was no moral agent, and was not to blame for anything which had occurred. But it was the outward sign of that favoritism which was so hateful to them, and there was a sort of childish gratification in their getting hold of it at last. Besides, it would add to the suffering of Joseph's heart to be deprived of this mark of his father's love. Hatred is an ugly wickedness. Its fiendish delight in another's agony makes it one of the most despicable feelings of the heart.

Next they cast Joseph into an empty water pit (v. 24). They had planned to slay him first and throw his dead body into the cistern (v. 20), but they had changed their mind. They were not going to slay him; they were only throwing him into a pit. If he starved to death, still they could not blame themselves for literal shedding of blood. This looks as though they had not been able altogether to silence the voice of conscience. But what a futile subterfuge was this! It reminds us of Aaron's defence against the charge of having made the golden calf: "And I said unto them, whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me; then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (Ex. 32:24). A pure accident, for which he was not to blame! But the sins which we commit indirectly are as much ours as those we commit with our own hands.

The sin these men were committing had its cruelty emphasized by the piteous cries of their brother which arose from the pit, as we learn from their own words (Gen. 42:21). Those cries sank more deeply into their hearts than they knew. They haunted them through the

years. They never forgot them. Long afterwards, when misfortune came upon them, they ascribed it to this crime, and particularly to this element in it: that they resisted the pleading of a brother's voice. When Shakespeare makes King Richard imagine that the spirits of those whom he had infamously killed visited him at night, he teaches in poetical form the fact set forth in the story of Joseph's brethren, that we cannot hush the memory of the voices that have entreated us against sin.

Conscience did not abandon these men, determined to sin. Their purpose was settled, and yet the fluctuation in its form showed their uneasiness. And the question of Judah showed that they were not so set in their willingness to incur the deepest guilt as they had supposed: "What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?" Judah here admitted that they were slaying him constructively by letting him perish of starvation. Conscience had made that much clear. But what need was there for them to bear the guilt of murder when there were other ways of getting rid of Joseph, which was the only thing desired after all? Besides, if they killed him, and concealed his blood, they would not have that feeling of advantage over him which they would have if he were still alive somewhere and conscious that he was bearing the brunt of their displeasure by being in slavery. Moreover, they could make some money out of the business, and this made the change in plan by no means to be despised. Thus did feelings of diverse character move these sinful men one way and another. Conscience was at work still, but it had great odds to contend against.

Lying was the next step in their wicked career. Here again we see their endeavor to sin in such a way that they could not be accused directly of it. They did not say

Joseph had been killed. As they handed the bloody coat to Jacob they did not relate to him some horrible story of how they had found Joseph in the last gasp of a long struggle with some wild beast, or how they had found the coat and seen nothing at all of Joseph. They brought out the coat saying, "This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no" (v. 32). There might be some question about that word "found." Did they find the coat? Probably in their versatile ingenuity in sinning they might have been able to show that in some sense they had found the coat. Nevertheless they lied. They intended to deceive and they did deceive. Their words were meant to convey an idea which they knew to be false. Jacob accepted that idea and they were responsible for it. The most of the lying that is done is something short of downright, but it is no less lying.

Worse than their lying, possibly, was their hypocrisy. This was especially shown in their comforting their grieving father. But it was shown also throughout, in their pretended solicitude for their brother. Everything they did was something of the part which they had set out to act, which did not represent their true selves. One of the elements of damage in any sin is not only that it leads on to other sins, such as lying, which are necessary in order to cover it up, but that it changes our whole disposition, method of life, way of feeling and acting. It makes us do as we would not do naturally, in a thousand different matters. It colors our whole life. It makes us hypocrites; makes us seem altogether what we are not.

The extent of the sin in which the brothers had involved themselves becomes apparent now. It was a five-fold sin. They had sinned against Joseph, a younger brother, entrusted to their society and influence in the



providence of God. They had meditated murder against him, but by the crossing of diverse sentiments within them they had spared his life, but deprived him of everything else. They had sinned also against their father, causing him unnecessary suffering of heart, and mocking him with their condolences. They had sinned against the whole household, who were led into mourning by their lie (v. 35). They had sinned against themselves, their better feelings, their conscience. They had sinned against God, to whom all sins reach ultimately, against whomsoever they may be committed immediately, whether ourselves or others. From a feeling of petty jealousy their sin had grown to be a disorganization of every relation of life in which they stood. Everybody they could sin against they had sinned against, and that heinously, and all for the gratification of an insignificant, unworthy sense of jealousy directed toward an old man and a boy, who were (to make matters worse) their own father and brother.

2. *The heartlessness of sin* is shown in this episode most strikingly. Here we see plainly how the evil feelings of the heart can conquer all that is lovely and sweet in the disposition, and can lead to acts of unimaginable brutality.

Joseph had come to them for their own good. Their father loved them and was interested in their safety, and out of this kindly solicitude he had sent Joseph, his well-beloved, to dare the dangers of the journey and find out how the brethren were prospering. It is more than likely that Joseph bore to them some dainties to eat. In any case he was the sign to them of their father's love, sent to them because their father wanted them to be happy. To kill him was like a convict's killing the messenger

who brings the governor's pardon. Always, sin, by reason of its hardening of the heart, makes men unable to understand what things are for their own good. The wicked stone the prophets sent for their blessing. The world nails to the cross the Son of God, who is incarnate because of his love for the world.

The heartlessness which made Joseph's brethren capable of slaying their own brother, even when he came to them as the messenger of love, led them on to a new act of depravity. They threw the helpless lad into the pit, and then, as though gloating in their brutal triumph, listening to the pitiful pleadings of their victim, "they sat down to eat bread" (v. 25). This is the finishing touch. The dramatic effect of this simple element in the elaboration of their wickedness is overwhelming. Well might Thomas Fuller exclaim, "With what heart could they say grace, either before or after meat!" Surely there was no blessing upon such a godless meal. Such heartlessness is more common than we may imagine. It is shown by whoever goes on contentedly eating and drinking and enjoying himself, careless of the need of the people of God for his sympathy and help; "that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph" (Amos 6:6).

The heartlessness of these brethren appears again in their insensibility to the barbarity of their recognition and at the same time their ill-treatment of the brotherly relation. There is something touching in Judah's plea for Joseph on the ground that he was their brother, their own flesh (v. 27), but it touches us with indignation because it was made a reason for selling Joseph into slavery. True, this was a mitigation of the crime contemplated. But Judah proved too much. If Joseph was their brother, their

flesh, they ought to have fought for him against every threatening evil, even at the cost of their own lives, lest even a hair of his head should be injured. There is something supremely absurd in Judah's brotherliness. It was his shame, if he had only been able to appreciate it. The world has too much of the brotherliness that is willing to consign to slavery.

But the climax of the flagrant heartlessness of Jacob's sons was shown when they actually went, in the supreme and shameless audacity of sin, to look upon their aged father's tears, to gloat over them, to revel in the thought that they had caused them, and to offer to him their hypocritical sympathy. Nothing in history compares with this except the kiss of Judas. Certainly these base men hated Jacob as well as Joseph. Their natural affection had been absorbed by envy. They were hardly human any longer. Such is the blighting power of the evil feelings that lurk in the soul of man.

3. *The futility of sin* is clearly exhibited here.

The brethren were defeated in all their purposes. They intended to murder Joseph, but there were cross-purposes acting in their own hearts which led them to modify their intention; then they cast Joseph into the pit; they changed this to a selling into slavery. The object they had was to get Joseph out of their way for ever. But he came into their way again. The tables were turned. They were in his power. Many a man who walks deliberately towards evil finds that he thwarts himself unconsciously over and over again. The way of the transgressor is hard, partly because of its disappointments.

The brothers unconsciously did the one thing necessary to make the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams possible: they sold him into Egypt. It was not the only time a

man did the exact opposite of what he thought he was doing. If we depart from God wilfully we are so blind that we are very apt to bring about what we are strenuously trying to avert. The only way to accomplish our purposes is to walk in the light.

The sin of the brethren had its return for them. They thought they had washed their hands of Joseph and all concerning him when they saw him pass westward on the caravan road and saw the father weeping over the bloody coat. But "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." They reaped at last their own sowing. And we cannot help noting that Jacob was reaping his now. He had not ruled over his household with wisdom. As he wept over the garment of his beloved son he was paying the penalty of his own thoughtlessness.

These sins were all, under God's overruling providence, serving the divine purpose. "The narrative has now reached the point when it seems as if the direct contrary of Joseph's former prophetic dreams would take place. He whose superiority his parents and brothers were to acknowledge now lives as a slave in a foreign land" (Kurtz). But those dreams were never so near accomplishment as now. And this has been brought about in spite of, yes, by means of, the sins of men.

## JOSEPH RULER IN EGYPT.

GEN. 41:38-48.

EVERY portion of the story of Joseph seems to have universal interest and unusual point. The study of the origin of the bad feeling of his brothers towards him throws much light on weaknesses in family life. The visit to his brethren, with its ensuing sale into slavery, shows us how sin grows when once it has found a welcome in the heart. The dramatic elevation of Joseph from the prison to the throne teaches us how God directs all things by his providence and brings what seems impossible to pass.

The figure of Joseph invested with the insignia of the highest rank is very imposing to the imagination. We see upon his hand the monarch's signet ring, the symbol of authority; he is clothed from head to foot in the long byssus robe, the dress of the priestly rank, the highest of all, to which the king belongs; about his neck is the golden chain, a special mark of distinction, like the "golden collar" of some European orders. And as his splendid chariot passes through the streets we can see the crowds of people prostrating themselves before him, and hear them shouting, "Abrech! Abrech!" "Bow the knee! Bow the knee!" As though we were there, we exult in fancying this elevation of a good man to the highest position of authority. We have seen Joseph in trouble, now we can see him in honor; and it is well worth while to think of the meaning of his new place in relation to himself.

1. *The way to honor* is shown to us here. If we want to find out how to succeed we should study the methods of successful men, of whom Joseph was one.

Uprightness marked all his conduct in Egypt, and this formed no small portion of the influences which helped him upward. It is true, his resistance of evil was the immediate cause of his imprisonment, but his imprisonment was the means of his being led from slavery to power. Moreover, his straightforward honorable conduct towards his fellow-prisoners, although it was forgotten for the time, had its share also in bringing about the great result. If Joseph had been a political wire-puller, a schemer willing to sell his principles to gain a place of power, he would have failed hopelessly. But he was an honest man, and "honesty is the best policy," it pays best even from the selfish, worldly point of view. But some one may say, do not wicked men prosper all about us? Yes, and the righteous are often afflicted. But these exceptions are distinctly acknowledged and emphasized in the Scriptures. Yet the Bible tells us that in the long run the men who are righteous shall prosper, even in earthly things, more than the wicked. It is God's world still, and he has not lost any of his control over it, and he desires that righteousness, taken the world over, shall be blessed, and he means to see that it is.

Patient submission to his lot was another element in Joseph's elevation. Cast into prison unjustly, we do not find him fuming and cursing against the evil fortune which brought him there; we do not hear him wishing that he had sinned and escaped this trouble, as weak men have done at times when they have had to pay the cost of having done right. No; Joseph accepted his lot without complaint, and made the best of it. If he had been a pas-

sionate prisoner, making his durance disagreeable to those whose office it was to keep in safety those committed to their charge, Joseph might have made himself a small notoriety, not great enough perhaps to reach Pharaoh's ears, but great enough to prevent his advancement into favor. It was not with any thought that he was paving his way to power thus that Joseph quietly submitted to his fate, but solely because he was a servant of God, and submissive to the divine will in all things. Who can tell how much more God would be able to do through us if we would accept our lot in patience. The road to honor lies often through the valley of humiliation, and yet while we are in that valley we cannot help feeling that things are somehow wrong, and that this cannot be the will of God. Whereas he tells us that if we are abased it is in order that he may exalt us, and he points us to Christ, our pattern, who was lowly and submissive to the conditions of his lot, and so was enabled to be the most sublime instrument of the purposes of God.

The filling of a humble place well also helped to bring Joseph to his noble height in the realm. Fortune made a prisoner of him. He accepted the situation, and was the best sort of a prisoner he knew how to be. There in the dungeon with him were two other unfortunates. He made himself friendly towards them, and used the gift which God gave him, of interpreting dreams, for their benefit : in one case bringing joy, in the other giving a frank warning of approaching death. Not a bit more faithfully did Joseph afterward use this supernatural gift for the help of Pharaoh than he used it in the service of the inmates of the prison. His conduct was consistent throughout ; in each place he did the best he could. Most men would utterly despise the life of an inmate of jail as a field of

work. To them it would be a place where there is nothing to do. Joseph teaches us that there is no such place on earth. The humblest artizan, the most insignificant office-boy, the lowliest servant-girl is better off than Joseph. To be faithful in those things which are least is not easy, but it is God's highway to broader service.

The bold use of the powers God gave him was a prominent part of the preparation for Joseph's advance to honor. In some way he knew that he was able to interpret dreams. If, in his consciousness of the possession of this marvellous supernatural gift, he had scorned to use it in so despicable a place as a prison, one link would have been lost necessary to the chain which led from slavery to princedom. If he had bragged to his fellow prisoners of what he could do, but had refused haughtily to use his powers in such a place, the Pharaoh would never have heard of his ability to interpret dreams. Confidently and obligingly he practised his divine art for the benefit of the lowly; and in the same spirit he did the same thing for Pharaoh. In jail he was not proud, in the palace he was not afraid. God had given him a certain gift, and wherever he found himself was a place for its exercise. How often we fancy our abilities are wasted upon those about us, or, going to the other extreme, are so overawed that we are afraid to do what we can.

2. *The use of honor* is exemplified in Joseph's conduct when brought into a noble position.

He accepted the place quietly. We do not see that he lost his self-possession when overwhelmed with the most stately honors any more than when overwhelmed with the most bitter degradation. A foreign slave in prison, he moved with the air of a self-respecting man. The Grand Vizier of the greatest empire of the world, he acted



with the simplicity of the humblest servant. He had his feelings like other men. We heard his cries of anguish from the pit ; we shall see him later weeping like a child. But his depth of feeling never broke down his manly independence. If he appreciated—and how could he help it?—the exalted rank of his new office, yet he did not hold himself to be anything else than a servant of God, elevated or humbled according to the almighty will, having as his duty to accept the place in which he found himself, whether high or low, and make the best of it. Such is not the way in which we are apt to conduct ourselves when circumstances change. If misfortune comes upon us we are disturbed, if large good fortune comes we are disturbed perhaps even more in another way. It is a great accomplishment to be able to take whatever God sends to us quietly, and to keep our thoughts about him, ourselves and others right. Joseph reminds us of the Quietists, people like Fenelon and Madame Guyon, who, with Paul, knew how to be abased, and how to be exalted, with their equanimity undisturbed.

Joseph accommodated himself to the conditions of the place of honor in which he found himself. He did not refuse the signet ring, the white robe, the royal chariot, the popular acclamations. He submitted to a change of name into the Egyptian fashion, and he married a daughter of the priest of On, which connected him more or less with the religious life of the nation. How much did these concessions to Egyptian usage mean ? In becoming "an Egyptian of the Egyptians" (Delitzsch) did he wink at their idolatry, and perhaps himself act as a priest ? In that case it may very plausibly be supposed "that the inherent fondness of the Ephraimites for idolatry is attributable to this origin" (Dods). But there is nothing to

lead us to think that Joseph departed from his loyalty to Jehovah. Rather we are led to believe that "the same hand of God, by which he had been so highly exalted after deep degradation, preserved him in his lofty post of honor from sinking into the heathenism of Egypt" (Keil). Daniel refusing the meat of the Babylonian king, and Joseph wearing the robe of an Egyptian priest, seem very far apart ethically. Yet we are to remember that both were guided by God, and under that guidance were led to different methods under somewhat similar circumstances. Resistance was required to the uttermost in Babylon; accommodation, as far as it was innocent, was required in Memphis. We remember that Jesus denounced the Pharisees with burning words sometimes, and at other times sat at meat with them. He told his disciples to shake the dust of their feet off against some places, and again he prayed not that they might be taken out of the world, but that they might be kept from the evil. The wisdom of God, if we will ask it, will always lead us not only into what is right, but also into what is best for others. Joseph "teaches us the lesson of willing co-operation, so far as may be, in the charities and duties of life, with those who do not share our faith, and shows us that the firmer our hold of the truth and the promise of God, the more safe and obligatory is it to become 'all things to all men,' that we may be all means help and 'save some.' No doubt that principle is often abused, and made an excuse for unhallowed mingling with the world; but it is a true principle for all that; and as long as Christian people seek to assimilate themselves to others, and to establish friendly relations for unselfish ends, and not from cowardice or a sneaking wish to be of the world, after all no harm will come of it" (McLaren).

Joseph used the honor which was put upon him as a service. He did not revel in the opportunities of his exalted station as a selfish man might have done. He did not use it to promote his personal interest still more. The office in which he found himself in the providence of God seemed to him to be a sacred trust. As his imprisonment offered to him an opportunity of blessing others, so his ennoblement only served to widen the area of his service. He set to work preparing granaries for the storing of a supply of food adequate for the approaching years of famine. The principle of his life was the service of others, from the time when he went out to Dothan to bring Jacob's greetings to the unworthy brethren to the time when, in dying, he gave his comforting blessing to those same men. If God has given to us anything of health, strength of mind, education, social influence, wealth, it is that we may use it for the service of man and thus to the honor of God. Our endowment of honor, whatever it may be, is an endowment for service.

3. *The origin of honor* must be noticed in order that we may interpret Joseph's exaltation aright, and get from it its true lesson for life.

God planned it for far-reaching reasons of his own. We can see these as Joseph could not. By reason of Joseph's position of authority, especially in connection with the control of the food supply during the famine, the way was prepared for Jacob and his family to go to Egypt, where they were to grow into a great multitude, were to learn the arts of Egyptian civilization, and were to be disciplined by trial for the place in history which God had for them. Joseph saw nothing of this. He accepted his place as a means of service to the Egyptians. But back of the Egyptians were the people of God, a race of vastly

more importance. God raised Joseph up for their sake. Whoever finds himself in any position of influence and honor may be sure that God had purposes in placing him there which reach much farther than he can imagine.

Joseph's exaltation was brought about providentially by the combination of events. If God had not shaped matters in a special way the exercise of Joseph's virtues which we have noticed could not have led to such a result. If Potiphar's wife had not fallen in love with him, if he had not been cast into prison, if the chief butler had not been imprisoned at the same time, if on being released he had not remembered Joseph at a critical moment, if Pharaoh had not dreamed, history would have been different. One circumstance altered would have broken the chain. What a wonderful group of coincidences, say you? Not so. What wonderful power in the providence of God to be able to weave the fleeting purposes and acts of men into so completely patterned a web. "With the suddenness of despotic countries, the slave of the moment before found himself raised to be Grand Vizier of the whole land" (Geikie). Even the fickle disposition of Oriental princes was an element in God's plan for the raising up a nation unto Himself. Let us never despair because events seem against us, or because we cannot see our way out of difficulties. The combinations of circumstance are infinite, and God is in them all.

Without the directly empowering grace of God, however, Joseph would not have been exalted. The power to interpret dreams was not of his own procurement or deriving; it came directly from God. Without this the remarkable combination of circumstances would have availed nothing, for Joseph would have had no power to take advantage of it. As often as he thought of his won-

derful career he would remind himself that it was all God's doing, for it all came about through God's gift. Whenever we find that we are succeeding in anything, commercial, intellectual, religious, whatever it may be, we should say to ourselves, "What hast thou which thou didst not receive?" and give God the glory due to his gifts.

What, in a word, is the universal lesson to be learned from Joseph's exaltation? That wherever we are we are in the hands of God, to do his will. Joseph on the throne was no different from Joseph in chains. In each place he accepted the situation, and used it as a service towards God. God can honor himself in us anywhere if we will only submit to do him obedient service. If God puts us in a humble place, even there we shall find more and holier work than we shall be able to do. Does he put us into a position of unusual publicity? Then he has some work for us there which we must find and accomplish. To high and low, to rich and poor, there should be the same purpose in life: to serve God with a quiet mind.

## JOSEPH FORGIVING HIS BRETHREN.

GEN. 45:1-15.

OF all the pictures of olden time preserved to us in the Bible there is none that seems more like an event of to-day than Joseph's announcement of himself to his brethren. The romantic element in the episode removes it from the level of ordinary life; it is doubtful if any of us ever knew in our own experience anything approaching in its unusualness the story of Joseph. Nevertheless as we look upon him, full of brotherly yearning, longing to give expression to the feelings of his heart, yet repressing them until just the proper moment had arrived, and then giving way to them in a burst of weeping, we discover in him that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. He is no longer a man of strange tongue and manner; he is one of us, and we understand him. Yet in some respects we may learn much from this meeting with his brethren.

1. *The character of Joseph's feelings* is shown to us.

They were *natural*. He asks as soon as he has disclosed himself: "Doth my father yet live?" There is the fond heart of the favorite son turning to the love of the indulgent father. Joseph had before this asked the same question. His reiteration shows his profound affection for Jacob. And "he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept" (v. 14), for they were children of the same mother and joined by double ties. It seems to be gratuitous to suggest that man has certain natural feelings, given to him by God, which are right, and worthy

to be active. But when men become highly civilized and self-restrained these natural feelings fall almost into disrepute, and those who set a high value upon them are looked upon as silly sentimentalists. A society that can generate *ennui* will smile pityingly at the normal emotions of the soul. May it not be that we to-day need to stimulate rather than repress feeling? Devoted as we are to the cultivation of the brain, the body, and the proprieties of social life, restrained at every point by iron-strong conventionalities, we may easily neglect the education of the feelings, which are more representative of the man than anything else. For the feelings are the indicators of our moral attitudes and the source of our action. Propose a certain course of conduct to a man, and the way he feels will tell you what he is. There are ages when feeling is over-luxuriant; ours is a time when it is more nearly dead. The love of parents, of home, of friends, of truth and purity and generosity, and everything which ought to be loved, needs cultivation among us.

These natural feelings in Joseph were *strong*. "He wept aloud; and the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard" (v. 2). Men do not usually weep except under the most extreme agitation, and then tears are the witness either of great passion or of great sensitiveness to something to which it is an honor to be sensitive. The maudlin sentimentalist is not very attractive to us; but we cannot help admiring the man who can be stirred deeply when it is right. If the love of parents for children to-day were more profound there would be fewer divorces. If the love of country were more genuine there would be less civic corruption. If reverence for God were stronger there would be less profanity. If personal bravery were more admired there would be fewer suicides. The weak-

ness morally of any age may be traced back to its lack of strong feeling on some fundamental element of life. God made us to have certain feelings and we ought to have and cultivate them.

Joseph's feelings were *broad*. Whatever feeling we have is apt to confine itself within a rather small selfish circle. Joseph, pardoning the crime his brethren had committed against him, was able to love them, to love them deeply, even to weep over them (v. 15). Ordinarily feeling increases in intensity according as the area over which it is spread diminishes. But when feeling was roused in the heart of Joseph it expanded and reached out generously to include even those who had hated him and tried to put him out of their way. It is not often, when a man has his personal affection raised to the highest pitch, that he feels that he must be generous in it, and not only do good to those whom he loves most but return good for evil to those who have injured him. It is possible to be supremely selfish in the exercise of the noblest feelings. We can love our own dear ones so well as to overlook our duty to our neighbor. We can love our own country so well that we may forget to think for the well-being of the rest of the world.

Profoundly moved as Joseph was, he would not flaunt his feelings before the curious or the unsympathetic; he held them to be *holy*. "And he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren" (v. 1), "because that pouring out of the affections and of natural tenderness towards his brethren and his parent was so great that he could not bear the presence and the looks of strangers" (Luther). If Joseph had delighted in having feeling stirred for the sake of the



pleasure of it he would have somewhat enjoyed the presence of spectators. Sentimentalists like to be gaped at, whether they be in joy or in grief. "There are some persons who rather love to have witnesses of their various feelings, and feel no sense of shame when they have given utterance to anything emotional before others. By these means feelings become vulgarized, weak, and frittered away" (Robertson). Joseph was not such a man. He felt deeply, and was willing to feel so, but not to make a show of himself to others. His emotions seemed to him sacred.

2. Joseph's *wisdom in directing his feelings* is quite as evident as their existence. He did not abandon himself to the luxury of selfish indulgence in giving way to his emotions.

He *restrained* them, until it was right and proper that they should be revealed. The man of feeling is apt to be unwise. The man of wisdom is in danger of being unfeeling. Joseph was emotional and at the same time wise. What was it that determined the time when he should gratify his heart and speak his love? For what did he wait? For the time when he could be assured that his brethren had repented of their old sin, and were changed into new men. He did not tell his brethren that he loved them until he knew that they were worthy of it. Joseph "has convinced himself that Benjamin is still alive, and has not become, like himself, a victim of his brothers' envy. He has taken a deep look into his brothers' hearts and has found them changed for the better. He has heard them, and above all Reuben, . . . repent and bewail the crime committed against himself, which is now visited upon them. Their tender affection for their aged father and their loyalty towards the only remaining son of

Rachel have been made manifest by Judah's speech . . . Their conduct under this last test is the clear reflection of their wakeful conscience, of their converted heart" (Delitzsch). There was no caprice in the bursting forth of Joseph's affection. He knew first that it was right.

Although feeling was so passionate Joseph did not lose control of his thoughts; he showed *tact* even in a time of intense excitement. "A less delicate mind would have talked of forgiving them; but he entreats them to forgive themselves, as though his forgiveness was not in question" (Bush). That is surely remarkable. Would we not expect to hear Joseph say magnanimously: "I forgive you everything"? How much more magnanimous was it to assume this forgiveness as a matter of course (although it was so great) and pass it by unmentioned. Many an act of kindness is made to hurt the recipient by an indelicate insistence that he shall recognize that it is kindness. Joseph used the utmost caution not to increase the chagrin the brethren felt at their situation. They repented; that was enough for him. He would say nothing about it. What superb refinement of unselfishness!

*True kindness* is visible in Joseph's laying emphasis on the impersonal element in that unbrotherly act which could hardly go unmentioned, and yet must be passed by quickly and delicately. Joseph said "be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (v. 5). The personal responsibility for the deed is here recognized, and yet a deeper aspect of it is seen: that the providence of God was at work in that selling into slavery. It was thus made plain to the brethren that Joseph bore no resentment because of the wrong they had done. And he could take this position justly inasmuch as he recognized

that they had repented of their crime and were changed men. The personal element became inconsiderable in view of the providential aspect of the matter. That Joseph saw this, and laid emphasis on it, shows what a genuinely kind heart was his and how truly he still loved his brethren. To see how much this meant, let each one of us suppose himself (granting it to be supposable for the moment) sold into slavery by his own brothers, afterwards having them completely in his power, and then saying to them: "No matter; no matter if you did sell me into slavery; it is all right now." To forgive would be difficult for the best of us; to make light of the deed out of consideration for the feelings of those who had wronged us would be almost inconceivable. Such was the grand magnanimity of Joseph.

The *moral effect* of what he was saying, upon the minds of the brethren, was nevertheless in Joseph's mind. He was magnanimous and forgiving, yet he would not tell a falsehood, he would not say that they had not sinned. In view of their repentance he turns their thoughts to the blessed result which God has brought about through their deed, but he does not say they are not responsible for it. He does not obliterate moral distinctions and call wrong right. They ought to have repented of their crime, and Joseph said nothing to make it appear that their repentance was unnecessary. When a child does wrong, and you forgive the wrong, does not the child begin to think that it was no wrong after all? It is a difficult thing to forgive others so kindly for their ill deeds that they shall not fancy that their repentance was possibly unnecessary. Joseph's words (v. 5) "might have been an injudicious speech to impenitent men; but no further view of sin can lighten its heinousness to a really penitent sinner. Prove

to him that his sin has become the means of untold good and you only humble him the more, and more deeply convince him that while he was recklessly gratifying himself, and sacrificing others for his own pleasure, God has been mindful of others, and, pardoning him, has blessed them" (Dods). "It is a comforting thought that, while we cannot undo the sin, God has kept it from undoing us, and has overruled it for greater good to ourselves and greater blessing to others than, perhaps, might otherwise have been obtained" (W. M. Taylor).

3. *Joseph used his feelings for the highest ends.* They were not only held in hand and directed wisely, but they were allowed to assert themselves in such a way, when the proper moment for assertion came, that wide blessing was secured.

The *love of the brethren* was secured permanently for Joseph by the thoughtful way in which he held himself, even when moved to the depth of his being. If the brethren had not been renewed men Joseph's magnanimity might have made them jealous of him. But his bearing was such that they could not have any ill-feeling towards him, and they must love him. How noble an achievement would it have been for him to secure their love under any circumstances! How supreme an achievement was it for him to do this when his superior position might naturally have tended to renew in them all their old bitter feelings, which now they would not have dared to express! To win the love of those who dislike us is a grand accomplishment, especially when fortune brings them to such a situation that they are under new obligations to us.

Joseph's love at once went out in *aid to his father*. He would have his brethren haste back to Canaan and bring Jacob down within reach of Egypt's supplies against

famine. After all these years of absence the love of the son for the father remained unabated. Absence and changed conditions had no effect upon it. What vast and touching affection was this. Is it not worth while to cultivate our God-given emotions when they are capable of so enriching life?

Joseph's eager love reached further still : it led to the *preservation of the people of God*. He recognized that God had raised him up, preserved him, endued him with those unconquerable emotions, that He might preserve "a remnant in the earth" (v. 7). By this expression Joséph places himself alongside the great prophets; he reveals an insight into the far-reaching plans of God for the blessing of the world. He shows himself conscious that his love for his father and his brethren did not terminate in itself; it was an instrument under the direction of God for the blessing of all human life. Who can tell what vast ends may be accomplished through our individual fidelity to the natural affections God has given us? The man who loves his home is helping the world. But always, like Joseph, we must remember to love those who are dearest to us not unwisely, but so that it shall bless the world.

Joseph never seems so exalted to us as when we study his wise love. And it cannot but remind us of that greater Life spent here on this earth in a most passionate affection, which was so thoughtful that we see it to have been the wisdom of God. No one ever loved so profoundly as our blessed Lord, and no one as wisely. The example of Joseph is emphasized to us preëminently in Him.

## JOSEPH'S LAST DAYS.

GEN. 50:14-26.

THE book of Genesis, so crowded with matter of profound interest, closes with a simple stateliness worthy of its character. It opens with the imposing process of creation. We sit as witnesses at a sublime spectacle, and watch the slow magnificence of the seven days passing before us. The book closes in the midst of earthly history. The long centuries of complex life have been inaugurated, and the succession of peoples and nations has begun. It has continued many thousands of years already. Who can tell how many thousand more are to be passed? The closing of Genesis seems to be an epitome of them all. We see Joseph returning from the burial of his father. Another patriarchal generation has passed off the stage of life. Joseph now has no one between him and death. He does not stand long in that position. God calls him to come out of the generations of the present and be reckoned among those of the past. With full consciousness of the meaning of what he is doing he steps across the line which divides what is from what was, and the patriarchal age is closed. So one generation comes and is succeeded by another, and as we stand by the bedside of the last of the patriarchs we seem to look out upon the whole procession of the ages. *The passage of generations* is the chief characteristic of history. Indeed it makes history. To keep it in mind, and act as we should in view of it, is one of the first duties of man. The close of Genesis shows us several aspects of thought concerning

this historically formative fact. In Joseph's brethren we see:

1. *The dread of change in the passage of generations.* They were not alone in having such a fear, for it is constantly recurring as the old men pass away, upon whom the younger have relied for wisdom and guidance and strength. "What shall we do now?" is a question that is always asked as men return from the burial of the fathers. When we have always had somebody else to lean upon it is appalling to think that now others must lean on us.

*The dominant influence of Jacob* had been a guarantee to the brethren that Joseph would do them no harm. Although they had not shown such respect to their father as they ought, they counted upon such respect in their brother. They knew that naturally he would abide by Jacob's will; indeed, because of special affection for his father, to do Jacob's will would have been a peculiar delight to him. While Jacob lived they felt safe in the protection which he would throw about them. But when he was gone, and there was no one to guide and control Joseph, might their lives not be endangered? Like men at other times in similar circumstances, in considering the stability which has come from the generation past, they forgot the possibility of its being inherited by the generation present.

*Conscience was awakened* in them by the change of circumstances. If naturally, under any conditions, they would have felt more foreboding at seeing the generation preceding them pass out of history, how must this foreboding have been magnified by the thought that they had committed crime against the generation now become the chief. When they sold Joseph into slavery they fancied they were getting rid of him and the memory of him for-

ever. Little did they imagine that the thought of him was to haunt them always ; to fill their hearts one day with terror, and even after the terror was past to keep them in dread. They were new men morally, but the memory of their great sin did not forsake them. Even in the regenerate soul conscience needs often to be reasoned into peace, when the recollection of past wrongs comes over it.

It was *hard for them to believe that they were forgiven*. For years now they had lived in peace with their brother. The ancient wrong which they had done him had been pardoned, and a happy reconciliation had characterized the brotherly relation. Joseph had not changed since he had opened his forgiving arms to them, and had wept tears of love over them. But conscience, which would never be wholly quiet as long as they lived, anticipated trouble even groundlessly. To be forgiven for so great a sin seemed too good to be true. They could believe in the forgiveness of Jacob, whom they had wronged almost as much as they had Joseph, but their faith in the generation dead they were not able to carry over to the generation living. Our sins tend to make us skeptical of great virtues in others. Seventeen years of happy reconciliation could not make the brethren certain that Joseph had really forgiven them. They prayed for his pardon as earnestly as though he had never shown them kindness.

*They did not appreciate Joseph* now nor ever. They misunderstood him, imagined feelings and motives in him which he did not have, and attributed their own ways of thinking to him, from the time when he was sent, for their good, to meet them at Dothan, until the present. They believed in the greatness of character of the generation past, but they could not transfer this faith to the



generation following. Our own contemporaries are apt to look smaller to us in every way than those who have gone before us. We cannot believe that those whom we have grown up with and known familiarly are great men, with the same kind of greatness which marked our ancestors. It is hard to trust the possibility of the best things at our own level. We are always imagining that some unusual circumstance must come in to make life noble. We cannot believe in the grandeur of life as we know it. Joseph had done everything possible to make the brethren believe in his forgiveness, and yet they suspected its genuineness. When we are conscious of desiring to do right it is sometimes one of our trials to be doubted.

*The plea upon which the brethren relied*, to secure that forgiveness which they feared they might not have, was that Joseph and they were servants of the same God, whom their father had also served (v. 17). The transitions of history made them uneasy, but they turned away from them to the everlasting God, with whom there is no changeableness, neither shadow of turning, and trusted to find in him that control over human hearts which they had found heretofore in the generation above them, but which they knew now must be sought for in its permanent form elsewhere. Jacob was gone, but the God of Jacob remained, the connecting element between the generations, the bridge spanning all the ages of history. It may not be altogether a calamity to lose our fathers if thereby we are driven to trust in our fathers' God.

2. *The inheritance of character*, which prevents such violent change as Joseph's brethren dreaded from the passage of generations, is exhibited in Joseph. Jacob they knew and depended upon. But Joseph was to be depended upon also, for he took up the good elements

of Jacob's life and transmitted them in his turn. However much we have trusted in the strength of the past we need not distrust the present, for God's law of moral inheritance guarantees the succession of goodness in the families of his people. His aged servants die, but he has led them to train others to take their place. What worthy traits do we see in Joseph? We see:

*Humility.* "Fear not; for am I in the place of God?" (V. 19.) He was the prime minister of the empire, having full control of the fortunes of the brethren. Yet he disclaims any desire to be a judge over them—he leaves that to God. "God has forgiven them; and, therefore, he himself can no longer retain their sins; nor would he, since that would be to put himself judicially in the place of the forgiving God" (Lange). Joseph's head was not turned by his unusual position. He never forgot who he was. He never assumed functions that did not belong to him. There are many, far less exalted than he, who do not hesitate to sit in judgment upon others.

*Magnanimity.* He was pained at the distrust of him shown by his brethren, after all the assurances of his favor which he had given. This (together with his love for them, which they did not recognize) moved him to tears. But when he replies to their petition there is not a word of upbraiding for their unbrotherly suspicion. He forgave them for selling him into slavery, he forgives them now for doubting the genuineness of that forgiveness. Joseph had not the least element of pettishness or spitefulness in him. He was of large mind, like Abraham.

*Love.* There was much that was unlovely in the unbelieving brethren, but Joseph had sincere affection for them nevertheless. There are some people one cannot help loving. Joseph himself might be reckoned as one

of these. There are others whom we love in the face of obstacles. We have to make allowances for them, offering excuse for their eccentricities, and finding natural causes for their bad temper and other failings. Such love has more moral benefit to ourselves, and doubtless brings more of blessing to others, than any other. "Love your enemies," said Christ, who loved as man never did.

*Justice* is revealed in Joseph's manner of quieting the fears of his brethren. He does not say that they had not sinned against him. On the contrary, he reminds them specially of their sin, showing that he recognizes, as well as they, its sinfulness: "As for you, ye meant evil against me" (v. 20). In forgiving them he does not say that there was nothing to forgive. His generosity was not so thoughtless as to persuade them that wrong was right. Indeed, if they had not sinned there was no virtue in his forgiving them. The grandeur of his love required the presupposition of their crime. There is nothing ever gained in blurring the distinction between right and wrong, even when we are in our kindest moods.

*Wisdom* is shown in Joseph's turning from the human and sinful aspect of the brothers' deed to its divine and blessed side: "God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (v. 20). It was of not much importance to him that he had been injured, if only the plans of God had been carried out thereby. He merged the personal in the eternal. This way of looking out widely over events, and studying them in their super-individualistic bearings, is part of what the Bible calls wisdom. It is selfish not only to be greedy of good things, but also to see events only from the personal point of view. Our own comfort and happiness are not of as much importance as that we should

take our due place in God's plan for blessing the generations of men.

*Sympathy* appears in Joseph's quieting of the fears of the brothers: "And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them" (v. 21). They were unreasonable and ungenerous in their attitude towards him. Their continued uncertainty of him was not a very handsome way of meeting his endeavors after their happiness. But he overlooked all that, tried to see the matter from their point of view, entered into their fears, and comforted them, who had once deprived him of all comfort. Often the tables are turned about in such a way that he who needs kindness is seen to be the one who gives it. We shall be most Christ-like not by begging but by giving sympathy.

3. *The passing on of the heritage* is set before us. The dread of change in the passage of the generations is met by God's law of the inheritance of character. Joseph exemplified the working of this law by showing himself a worthy descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But his time to retire from among the living came, and then what? Then he passed on, as far as he could, the heritage which he had received, to those who came after.

*He met death calmly*, showing that those who serve God by transmitting the blessings and the characteristics of his people must not repine or be cowardly when God calls them to make way for their successors. He called his brethren about him and calmly told them he was about to die. Life was sweet to him as to every living soul, but sweeter was the will of God. He was ready to go because his work was done and God's time had arrived. He rounded out a noble life with a noble death. How lovely, how quieting, how comforting to those who

remain, is such a serene passage to the realms of the blessed! Precious in the sight of those who follow, as well as in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints.

Joseph's *insight into the future* gave especial significance to his death, for his posterity. The sadness of leaving the charge God had committed to him, and the scenes of earth that were dear to his eyes, and the faces he loved, was eclipsed by the glory of God's people which spread out before his closing eyes. He saw them visited of God and brought up "unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (v. 24). If he had been thinking only of himself and of the personal meaning of death to him, this glimpse of the future might have escaped him. But in death as in life he looked at himself as a servant of God, and his existence as having value only as it held its due place in the plan of God. Taking such a broad outlook, God gave him this insight into the future. And not the least part of Joseph's life work were his dying words, which confirmed the belief of God's people in their own destiny and in the patriarchal covenant.

*National sentiment* arose within his heart. He had been a man without a country. His first work had been for an alien nation. But he never thought of himself as an Egyptian. The Hebrew spirit within him was never quenched. The inheritance which he perpetuated was not that of the Pharaohs, but that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He handed on to his successor the spirit of godly patriotism.

*Faith in the immediate earthly destiny* of the people of God was marked by his charge concerning his burial. Not many centuries after, but in the comparatively near future, he saw the Israelites emerging from Egypt to fulfil their destiny. So firm was his belief in this that he di-

rected them not to bury him until it should be accomplished. "Through all the terrible bondage they were destined to suffer, the embalmed body of Joseph stood as the most eloquent advocate of God's faithfulness, ceaselessly reminding the despondent generations of the oath which God would yet enable them to fulfil" (Dods). Joseph's dying request is a grand example of faith, indeed in the passage on faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews this is singled out of all the events of his life as especially indicating his faith: "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (11:22).

*The vision of God* was the source of this sublime faith in the covenant which was Joseph's bequest to the generations following. "I die; but God will surely visit you" (v. 24). What difference does it make if the generations change? God abides, and all history is one to him, and his purposes shall be accomplished at last. If we can hold to this ourselves and perpetuate it in our descendants we shall not have lived in vain.

Joseph seems most real to us because we are let into his heart so completely. Yet Joseph has been dead these three thousands of years. And we too shall soon be gone, and the hurrying generations will crowd us into antiquity. And what shall remain of us? Nothing earthly, however splendid. But there may remain the heritage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the heritage of Joseph: faith in God and in his blessed providence in history. May we get all good out of this for ourselves, and hand it on safely to the centuries waiting to follow.

## ISRAEL IN EGYPT.

EXODUS I : 1-14.

“Egypt ! from whose all dateless tombs arose  
Forgotten Pharaohs from their long repose.”

WHAT wonderful messages the graves along the Nile have been whispering to us after these long ages of silence! Who could have believed that upon the page of an American magazine we should look at the photograph of the face of Rameses II., the Pharaoh of the oppression? Who could have dreamed that one of the store-cities of Egypt would be uncovered, to give up into our hands bricks made without straw? These things are almost incredible, so overwhelmingly literal an answer are they to our longing to have something material to witness to the history of that ancient land. It seems as though archæology could give us no greater surprises than these, and yet we do not know what to expect, and we can only hold our minds in suspense while the slow work of pick and shovel goes on. Such discoveries make all books antiquated. The commentaries, the Bible dictionaries, the encyclopædias are out of date almost before they are dry from the press. The sceptic trembles to make his old flings at the Bible, for he may be interrupted in the midst of a sentence with the report of a new find which renders his criticisms ridiculous. Renan in his “History of Israel” ridiculed the idea of writing being known in Palestine in Abraham’s day. But on the Tel-el-Amarna tablets we look upon writing made just then and there. Well may

an American archæologist exclaim: "What a pity that M. Renan's criticism of the Mosaic annals had not been delayed for a few months!" The discoveries of Naville and Flinders Petrie have vivified Egyptian history for us. The text books and the cyclopædic articles must all be rewritten. But there is one book that needs no change: the Bible had these things right all the time. Its trustworthiness is being established triumphantly.

And yet to establish the trustworthiness of any book is only a preliminary step to getting at the meaning of it, in order that it may be applied practically. Fascinating as the archæological side of the study of Exodus is, we must turn from it to get the lessons of the book. For "all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition."

Genesis gives us the story of the forming of a world; Exodus of the forming of a nation. The men who appear in the narrative of Genesis appear as individuals; in Exodus the individual passes into obscurity as the people emerges. In Genesis special revelations are given by God to specially favored persons; in Exodus a multitude receive these revelations, and Sinai thunders not for Moses alone but for all Israel. So we learn that human history is not meant to be individualistic but social, organized. Exodus gives us the history of the nationalization of Israel—at the beginning they are a family, at the end they are a people holding an independent life among the nations of the world. This nationalization is described to us in two steps: deliverance (chapters 1-14), and consecration (chapters 15-40) (Macgregor). The first seven verses of the first chapter are the introduction to the whole book. They begin with the word "now," indicating the continuity of history, and at the same time the



beginning of a new era. The first fourteen verses may be analyzed as to substance into two parts: *the sojourn* (vs. 1-7), and *the oppression* (vs. 8-14).

#### I. THE SOJOURN.

The *silence of Scripture* concerning it cannot fail to be marked. Four hundred and thirty years are covered by a single verse (v. 7) which reveals but a single fact. The whole book of Exodus covers practically only the events of two years. The contrast between the place of the centuries of sojourn, and of these two years, in the Bible record, is startling. Why should there be such a difference in the fulness of treatment?

God gave no new revelations of himself during those centuries. The work of his people there was to grow. But mere growth is only a means to an end. The end is the receiving and propagating the truth of God. Bible history is related from the point of view of revelation. When there is no revelation there is nothing to relate. "Israel has no history generally except so far as it is the organ of revelation . . . It is the peculiarity of Israel to possess history and historical literature in the full sense of the words only in proportion as it realizes its vocation in the history of the world" (Oehler).

God is more than man. Our knowledge of man is only relatively important. It is valuable only as it leads us to know God, which is the chief thing. The Bible history is in a sense more a history of God (that is, as he has come into connection with earthly life), than a history of man. The object of it is not to inform us for the sake of being informed concerning everything belonging to the life of man, but to show us what God has done for men, how he has done it, how they have received it and with what consequences, that we may learn from their

"ensample" and be led to receive God's truth and God himself.

The *external schooling* of God's people was going on in those unrecorded years. As men cannot come into contact without being influenced the one by the other, so nations do not meet without consequences in national character. The external results of Israel's stay in Egypt are not recorded, because they were not immediately related to the reception of divine truth. Yet they were indirectly important even to that end, because through them Israel was given a true national life, which made the retention of the divine revelation possible.

Stability of life was taught to them. Over four hundred years they lived in one place, and so learned the habit of definite residence. Immediately, to be sure, they were plunged into a renewal of their old nomadic life, for forty years. But these forty years did not overcome the influence of the four hundred and thirty. The stay in Egypt substituted once for all for the Israelites the settled life of a nation instead of the roving life of a tribe.

They gained some elements of civilization in Egypt which helped to make permanently local life possible. People who live in towns must know how to build houses; Israel learned architecture in Egypt. Dwellers in houses dress, eat, sleep differently from dwellers in tents; clothing, food, the implements and furniture of the house were civilized by the Egyptian sojourn. The "arts and letters" of that ancient civilization were teachers of the Hebrews.

Political organization in a genealogical way developed itself in Egypt (Oehler). The tribal division of the nation was originated and made permanent there. No man among the descendants of these tribes was ever so

great that his children were able to give their names to a new tribal division. The arrangements made in Egypt governed Israelitish history thenceforth always.

It is also possible that bad elements entered into Israelitish life in Egypt, as well as good. The golden calf set up by Aaron was undoubtedly a reminiscence of the worship of Apis. The pantheon of Egypt was well filled with deities, and it is not strange that Israel inferred that idolatry was a corollary of civilization. Afterwards, whenever periods of culture-worship came over the Jews, they immediately felt drawn to idolatry. In this direction the bad influence of Egypt was permanent with them.

The *growth of the people* during the sojourn in Egypt was the most important fact concerning them, that which was absolutely necessary to their success as preservers of the oracles of God; and it is the only fact mentioned in Scripture (v. 7). God wanted a nation; only a nation could accomplish his work. The growth into a nation becomes therefore the supremely important matter. This growth was extremely rapid: seventy souls went down to Egypt, we are told, and about two millions came back, after the expiration of four hundred and thirty years.

Certain things help to explain this large increase. Seventy souls were not all in the company who went down; the servants must be added, the retainers of all kinds. These are numerous in an oriental household, and it has been estimated that the entire retinue of Jacob and his sons may have numbered as many as two thousand, perhaps three thousand (Norris). It has been pointed out that many Egyptians must have been drawn to the Israelites and, so to say, been "naturalized." "We do not know how far Israel's increase may have been oc-

casioned by accessions from without of men attracted by what they saw or heard of in this people" (Macgregor). It is also said that Egypt has extraordinary fruitfulness in both men and cattle (Aristotle, Columella, Pliny, Rossmüller—cited by Keil). These circumstances help to show that an extraordinary increase in the Israelitish population would not be impossible.

Yet the increase described in Exodus cannot be explained altogether on natural grounds. A supernatural cause was at work, so that the Egyptians were surprised, as they would not have been at a natural though unusual increase. The Lord God Almighty chose his own way of making his people. He might have allowed their growth to be completely conditioned by natural law, or he might have made it wholly miraculous. In this case he used the natural supernaturally. In the darkness of that age without revelation there was this sign to the Israelites that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not forgotten them.

## 2. THE OPPRESSION.

The *ingratitude of kings* is exhibited here among the causes leading to Israel's trouble. A new king, perhaps a new dynasty, as is thought, arose, "which knew not Joseph." To the Egyptian people forever, one might have thought, Joseph's memory would be grateful. As long as the nation lasted it should have cherished the name of him who saved it from extermination. But the time came when the children might ask "Who was Joseph?" and no one could tell. A little story of like ingratitude is imbedded in the book of Ecclesiastes: "There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in

it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man" (Eccl. 10: 14, 15). But the ingratitude of the Egyptian kings worked out certain glorious results unknown to them, but plain in the foresight of God.

The *shrewd statecraft* of the Egyptians was another hostile element in the Israelitish life through which at last the blessing of God was to be secured to them. The growth of the Hebrews was manifest; if it went on they might join with the foes of the empire and secure their liberty—and the Egyptians did not want to lose so peaceable and prosperous a colony; therefore life must be made hard for the Israelites. We see here an example of selfish nationalism, "jingoism" they would call it in England, which is as much of a mistake in nations as in men. The selfish man is always defeating himself, and the same is true of the selfish nation. "High policy, therefore, which, in Old Egypt, and in other lands and ages nearer home, has too often meant undisguised selfishness and cynical cruelty, required that the peaceful happiness of a whole nation should be sacrificed; and the calm Pharaoh, whose unimpassioned callous face we can still see on the monuments, laid his plans as unmoved as if he had been arranging for the diminution of the vermin in the palace walls. What would he have thought if any of his counsellors had suggested, 'Try kindness!'" (McLaren).

The *prosperity of the Israelites* increased under these repressive measures (v. 12). As the Spartans thinned out their slaves by assassination, the Egyptians tried to kill off the Hebrews by laying upon them impossible tasks. But Israel was an arch whose strength was increased by the weight put upon it. The Egyptians tried to crush the spirit of liberty which they feared might rise among the

Hebrews, and they succeeded in confirming it. To those oppressed brick-makers all things must work together for good, and the curses pronounced upon them by their enemies were transformed into blessings.

The *reason of failure* in this scheme of repression was that God intended that it should fail. He had let man's wrath vent itself against innocent Joseph, because he had plans for the world in Joseph; and he let Pharaoh pile up the burdens on the back of patient Israel, only to Israel's benefit, because he was planning great things for history through Israel. We have often seen a child pushing against a door which was held by some one on the other side. Every inch of yielding seemed to promise success, and courage rose; but it was certain to end in failure because the door was controlled by a force, unseen to the child, greater than his own. Egypt looks to us like such a child. The door cannot open except by God's desire. Israel is safe; it cannot be overwhelmed by any amount of hardship, for God Almighty is sustaining it. Everything must fail that is against the will of God, for he means that it shall fail, and he has power to make it fail.

The *secondary result* for the Israelites was an increase in the rigor of their servitude (vs. 13-14). Heavier and heavier were the burdens that were laid upon them. But this very rigor was necessary in order to confirm in Israel the desire for freedom, and to exasperate it to the point of escaping. All along the Egyptians only caused what they were trying to prevent. They planned for themselves and secured the success of the plans of God.

### 3. GENERAL LESSONS.

We learn here *how to estimate national success*. Externals are no more a criterion for the judgment of races

than of men. Prosperity is not the end of a people's existence. We must ask how that prosperity is employed. The periods of Israelitish history have value according as they are related to the spread of the truth of God. The age of religious darkness, even if it be an age of ease and development, is not a glorious age. Under the influence of politico-economical studies we are apt to estimate national life by commercial prosperity. But we should judge it rather by its success in advancing righteousness and godliness.

*God directs the ways of the nations.* Egypt throws itself upon Israel only to exalt Israel to the skies, because the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. We can see in a dim way how God has used special nations for special purposes in connection with his plans for the kingdom of God. The Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Teutons, have each contributed a special element to the international success of God's work in the world. Doubtless the same thing will be seen to be true of us, by those who shall follow, ages hence. We cannot tell altogether what we are doing, but God is at work in us and will bend all things to his holy will.

*God's fulfilment of his promises* is exemplified in the Egyptian experience of Israel. He told Abraham that his seed should dwell in a strange land, and be afflicted four hundred years, and afterwards come out prosperously (Gen. 15: 13, 14). He told Jacob not to fear to go down to Egypt, for he should be brought back (Gen. 46: 4). These were special indications of precisely what the Israelites were now experiencing. And underneath these particular promises lay the great charter promise given to Abraham: that through him all the families of the earth should be blessed. Ages may pass before God

accomplishes his word, but not a jot or tittle of it fails at last.

The *blessedness of trouble* is set before us in these persecuted Hebrews. The best qualities could not be established in them by the easy life they had had for four centuries. Patience, hope, faith in God, refinement of soul could come to them only under the taskmaster's lash. So long as there shall be human hearts capable of advance in what is good there shall be a beneficent place for trial.

The Israelites are *a type*. "In the servitude of Israel we behold a lively image of man's natural bondage to sin and Satan. In the deliverance from Egypt is foreshown redemption from this thralldom; and the journey through the wilderness is a graphic programme of a Christian's journey through life to his final inheritance in the heavenly Canaan" (Bush).



## THE CHILDHOOD OF MOSES.

EXODUS 2 : 1-10.

THE story of the child Moses, one of the most romantic of the Bible, if not of all history, has special interest, aside from that which it excites in the antiquarian and the lover of tales. It has a profound lesson for us concerning the relation of God to history. Sometimes we are impressed by the largeness of God's dealings with men, his martialing of the nations into his service, his overruling of the centuries for the accomplishing of his designs. In the story of the infant Moses we see, by contrast, how God stoops to the smallest details of life, controls them unobserved, and makes them take their place in his purpose. The Almighty is an artificer whose power reaches up to the construction of a myriad suns in the firmament, and down to the tapering of a grass blade. The narrative of the infancy of Moses shows God working in littles, taking many things and using them, even when they seem without consequence, as valuable materials for his design.

"It is remarkable that all the persons in this narrative are anonymous" (McLaren). We know the names of some of them from other sources, but here their individuality is kept in the background. Perhaps this is in order that the reader's thought may be turned to God. For, while God is not named either, God's presence and directing power are suggested at every turn of the story. No such chapter of incidents as those which united to lead to the saving of Moses' life could be credited to

happy accident. There is no word here about God, and yet he is revealed in every word. Many diverse forces have come into play (as in every event), but we see God using them every one.

1. A *defiled race* is marked as his chosen instrument. Levi had been the coadjutor of Simeon in the treacherous and brutal slaying of Hamor the Hivite and his people (Gen. 34:25). When Jacob on his death-bed called his sons together to bless and warn them, Levi and Simeon were reminded of their cruelty by their father's words:

"Simeon and Levi are brethren :  
Weapons of violence are their swords.  
O my soul, come not thou into their council ;  
Unto their assembly, my glory, be not thou united ;  
For in their anger they slew a man,  
And in their self-will they houghed an ox.  
Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce,  
And their wrath, for it was cruel :  
I will divide them in Jacob,  
And scatter them in Israel."

Gen. 49:5-7 (R. V.)

About the least promising branch of the patriarchal stock was chosen by God to bear the child who should become in due time the deliverer of the people of God. By selecting the least favorable material in the construction of his work he showed that he was not limited by its imperfections, but was able to overcome them by his wisdom and his power. It is not always those who seem best adapted to be implements in the hands of God whom God chooses to employ. He is ever reminding us that everything comes from him, that all is of grace, by the way in which he selects his agents. "Not many mighty are called." "But God hath chosen the foolish things of

the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: *that no flesh should glory in his presence*" (1. Cor. 1: 27-29).

2. *A child* is selected from this unpropitious branch of the patriarchal family to be used by God according to his will. This child, by his race, was brought into danger from the moment of his birth. Might not God have chosen a Hebrew already grown to deliver his people, so that this special risk to his plans might have been avoided? Surely. But God intended to have the leader of his people educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, so that he should carry away the elements of civilization into the new country. But no Hebrew man could have found entrance to the palace, so as to receive the best elements of Egyptian culture. Where a man could not have gone a child could go, we learn from the sequel. So this little babe is set apart of God for his purpose. Perhaps his being in appearance "a goodly child" (Heb. 11: 23), "fair unto God" (Acts 7: 20, R. V. margin) may have been a mark of God's setting apart. "God sometimes gives early earnest of his gifts, and manifests himself betimes in those for whom and by whom he designs to do great things. Thus he put an early strength into Samson, Judges 13: 24; an early forwardness into Samuel, 1 Sam. 2: 18; wrought an early deliverance for David, 1 Sam. 17: 37; and began betimes with Timothy, 2 Tim. 3: 15" (M. Henry). But the point for us to remark is that God chose not a giant but a crying infant as the deliverer of his people.

3. *Maternal daring* had its place in the accomplishment of God's design. The mother concealed her child as long as possible, and then did what seems to be the most reckless thing possible—she exposed him on the river Nile, a place fraught with every danger. Here, one might well say, was the despair of love. What could the anxious mother hope would happen to her boy? Was there any plan in her mind? No: this was sheer abandonment of her treasure to chance. And yet not quite. That same feeling in the heart which had led her to defy the king's command thus far led her to this daring act. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents" (Heb. 11: 23), and by faith he was placed in the little ark of papyrus and bitumen and consigned, not so much to the doubtful mercies of the Nile, as to the protection of God. The mother's faith caused the mother's daring, which led to the exposure, which was necessary to the plan of God.

4. *Nature* itself we see here obeying the Almighty's will. The child might have been swept away by the river current. The crocodiles that infested the river might have made this little life their prey. But nature was kinder than man, for nature is more obedient than man to God, "who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; who maketh the clouds his chariot; who walketh upon the wings of the wind: who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire" (Psa. 104: 3-4). It is strange that we should think man more easily bent to God's will than natural law, when the exact reverse is true. As the lions could not hurt Daniel so the destructive natural elements which surrounded the infant Moses were powerless to harm him, for God was watching him and planning for him, and nature is God's willing handmaid.

5. *Sisterly affection* had its part in the plan of God. Those watchful eyes were watching out of love, but they were watching for God. The waiting sister was a link between Moses' birth and his Egyptian adoption. Through her it was known what had become of him, through her his own mother became his nurse, and in this way the secret of his origin (however unknown it may have been to him for years possibly) was, not altogether lost. The knowledge of the brotherhood of Aaron, so necessary to him later, was in this way made possible. Moses in the palace of the princess seemed an unknown waif. But in truth he was never unknown. Always the Hebrews knew that over within those palace walls which they could not enter there was a certain boy who belonged to them. The watching of the sister was thus the means of preserving the identity of Moses, which became a matter of importance later in his history.

6. *The princess* was an instrument in the hands of God. That paradoxical element in events which the Greeks often marked, and which has been called the "irony of history", is conspicuously suggested here. Here was Pharaoh dreading the uprising of the Jews and their escape from his control. And here was Pharaoh's own daughter sheltering and fitting for leadership the very man who was to accomplish all that Pharaoh dreaded. How futile are the attempts of man to thwart the plans of the Almighty, when they can be utilized literally as means of accomplishing them! We are reminded of the persecution against the early church, which, by scattering the Christians through various provinces, only propagated the gospel it was intended to destroy.

7. *The natural feelings* of the human heart we see here to be used by God. "And she had compassion on

him" (v. 6). Was there a conflict between the feeling of duty toward the expressed command of the Pharaoh, and the natural feeling of pity which God had implanted in the heart of this princess? In any case the right feeling triumphed and Moses was saved. His life depended upon the impulse of a stranger. But the heart of man is one of the ministers of God. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). This was far from being the only time when the safety of the people of God has seemed to hang upon royal caprice. But the same power that subdues nature controls the fickle feelings of the human soul, and when God so wills it, even his enemies freely choose such things as make for the blessing of the people of God.

8. *The cry of the child* was a not unimportant link in this chain of events. By it that sweet impulse of compassion was evoked which led to the sparing of Moses' life (v. 6). How pitiful a wail was this that rose from the little basket among the reeds! How trifling a sound there on the edge of the most imposing civilization of the world! But on that little voice there hung the fate of God's people, in which was involved the religious destiny of the whole world. How many "ifs" rise in our minds as we think about it. Yet there was no "if" in it at all. The far seeing, infinitely loving eyes of Jehovah were looking down upon that scene beside the Nile, and the thought which rules the ages rose to expression in the weeping of that helpless child. Could there be any more sublime exhibition of the truth that God employs the most insignificant things to accomplish his will?

9. *The court of Egypt* comes next into view as a factor in the scheme of the Almighty. We see Moses

adopted as the son of the Egyptian princess (v. 10) and so having opened to him that opportunity of education in "the wisdom of the Egyptians," in that statecraft and social culture which were an essential part of his equipment as the founder of a nation. At one moment we see God depending, so to say, on an infant's wail for the success of his plans; the next, we see nothing less than an empire taking its place as a like instrument. And it was no harder for God to bend Egypt to his use than to make the child Moses cry piteously at the right moment. Great things or small are alike to Him, whose knowledge reaches beyond the stars and condescends to the slightest insect that skims through the air on the breath of summer.

In all these various elements which must enter in to secure the Egyptian destiny of Moses we see the hand of God at work. The materials he employs may be noble or ignoble, natural or supernatural, willing or unwilling, insignificant or mighty. All come into their proper place and serve their purpose for the master hand. The broad lessons of the story of the infancy of Moses are now apparent:

1. We see *the persistence of God's purpose*. If one link in the chain of circumstances which led Moses from his mother's arms into the Egyptian palace had been lacking, we might say, the whole plan would have fallen through. But no link was lacking; no link ever is lacking in the completion of God's work. His will is always, beyond any possibility of defeat, exactly accomplished. This seems a very commonplace of religious thought, and yet it plays no great part practically in the thinking of men. They believe that men succeed, but they do not observe that God succeeds. Even Saul of Tarsus, a devoutly religious man, kicked against the pricks. The

common thought about the best way to live is that we should plan as well as we can and work out our plan with all our might, whereas, in view of the supremacy of God, it would be much more reasonable for us to ask what God's plans are, and accommodate ourselves to them. They are the only plans that never fail, and along their line alone is success inevitable.

2. *Man's attitude* to God's plan is open to himself to choose. He may oppose, as Pharaoh did, or he may acquiesce, as Pharaoh's daughter (unwittingly) did. It would not be right to say that the princess' conduct was chosen in conscious obedience to God. Yet her compassion was a kind of obedience, inasmuch as it was yielding to a God-given impulse. She was doing right, while the Pharaoh was doing wrong. In either case the will of God was accomplished. By our help God succeeds, if help we give; if not, he succeeds by our antagonism. So far as his plans are concerned the result is the same either way. Man is absolutely impotent to alter that.

3. *The result to man*, however, differs according to his attitude toward God. Pharaoh opposed God, and the opposition resulted in the drowning of the Egyptian host in the Red Sea. Moses' parents obeyed God (although the perilous situation of God's people might have tended to create doubt), and their child was saved, and the people of God too, as a sequel. Men are apathetic toward the purposes of God. Look out over those whom we know and the mass of them care not a straw for the will of God. Yet that will is the determining element in their destiny, both for this life and that which is to come. Obedience to it means that the success which always comes to the will of God will be shared by man; rebellion



against it means that in the success of the will of God the ruin of the hostile individual will be involved. The point of special application is found in Jesus Christ. In him all the historic purposes of God are focussed. He is bound to come to supremacy everywhere and in everything. But Simeon foresaw of the infant Christ that he should be set "for the falling and rising up of many in Israel" (Luke 2: 34. R. V.). Christ is possibly a stumbling-block, but on the other hand he may be the power and wisdom of God to us, if we will have it so (1 Cor. 1: 22-24). To some his gospel is "the savor of death unto death"; but to whosoever will accept it, it is "the savor of life unto life" (2 Cor. 2: 16). The will of God is the determining element in history, and that is expressed to us in Jesus Christ, who, accordingly, is the determining element in our individual destiny according to our attitude toward him.

4. *God's instruments are safe* until his use of them is over. Moses could not have perished while God had a work for him to do. The little boat which contained the Saviour could not be overwhelmed by the waves of Genesaret. We cannot die while God has work awaiting us. When that work is done, we should be willing to go, whether it be soon or late.

5. *God is in all things* for us, great or small. "God was as truly in the removal of the little ones that were taken away as he was in the saving of Amram's son; and there were lessons of love and warning from the one no less than of love and encouragement from the other" (Wm. M. Taylor). Our trouble is in God's plans as well as our peace. Everything works for him, and, by the same token, everything works for us while we are living in his love.

## MOSES SENT AS A DELIVERER.

EXOD. 3:10-20.

MOSES had received his education in the wisdom of Egypt; by an impulsive but well-meant act he had brought upon himself the disfavor of Pharaoh and had fled for his life; in a strange land he had settled and married and lived to a ripe age; and after these many years of vicissitude, all of which were making him ready for his life-work, the voice of Jehovah called him from being an obscure shepherd on the fields of Midian to enter actively and conspicuously into the history of the world, by leading the people of God from slavery into freedom. The Moses who replies to the voice of God seems different from what we might have expected. We see in him no promptitude, no exultation in his mission, but rather feelings of the opposite sort. We are impressed with (*a*) his *self-consciousness*. God has revealed to him the chief end of his life; the sublime mission, given to him alone of all men in history, stands disclosed. One might think that all the imagination, enthusiasm and courage of the man's heart would have been roused by this splendid vision. We look to see Moses swept up to the seventh heaven of moral and spiritual exaltation by the call of God. Not so. He thinks only of himself: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" Who was he indeed, that the thought of self should so intrude upon the thought of God's work? (*b*) *His self-distrust* appears. When last we saw him he was taking upon himself without hesitation the part of an avenger of his

people. Then he did not fear to thrust himself into matters other than his own. Now he is reluctant to take up that which God declares to belong to him. "He had learned humility in the school of Midian, and was filled in consequence with distrust of his own power and fitness" (Keil). (c) *The weakness of faith* made him hesitate. Even more in the chapter which follows is this made plain. There his reluctance to do God's work becomes almost painful. This "languor of faith, amounting to lack of confidence in God" (Macgregor), is hardly what we might have looked for in one who was to be the commander of a nation. The same truth impresses itself upon us here which we learn from the story of the infancy of Moses, that God chooses weak instruments for mighty ends, in order that we may learn that man is nothing and God is everything.

Accepting the fact of Moses' weakness, we are to learn now of God's overcoming of it by a special preparation of Moses' heart and mind. Moses at the bush on Horeb, and Moses demanding of Pharaoh the release of God's people, seem like two different persons. And indeed they are different, for God had come specially into Moses' life and had prepared him for his mission. Various elements in this proposition are set before us.

1. God discloses the fact that *he had chosen Moses* for this mission. "I will send thee unto Pharaoh" (v. 10). The mission sought the man, not the man the mission. Forty years before Moses had tried the role of deliverer and had found himself unfitted for it. Since then he had modestly confined himself to a very humble career. He was not ambitious to be a great man. He had no desire to attack the problem of Israelitish deliverance. The designation of himself as the person for this work came

wholly from God. If ever, during the time when Moses was breaking down the power of Pharaoh, the thought of the exceeding daring of his position crossed his mind, he could reassure himself by remembering that he had not brought himself there, but had been sent by God. If a man should plan ambitiously to bring some vast responsibility upon himself, and by means of skilful scheming should succeed, his very success might strike terror into his soul. He might find himself filled with such dread as comes over some barbarian when he finds that he is desecrating by his presence some temple, whose walls he had long been storming. Where God does the choosing for us, there we need not feel timid. When we are upon the King's business we need not hesitate. It was a very essential part of Moses' preparation that he should know that his work was chosen by God.

2. *The planning* was done by God: "that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." This was an incredible, almost impossible, task. No man in his own strength would dare to make such a proposal. To attempt to carry out such a design with such resources only as Moses had in himself, and the Israelites had in themselves, would have been only to court destruction. Moses of his own thought would neither have set himself to do such a work nor would he have advised any other man to attempt it, however much more capable than himself. The project in its boldness was more than human. No human thought would have dared anything so colossal. The inefficiency of the Israelites for such an undertaking becomes evident when we remember that they contributed absolutely nothing to its accomplishment. It succeeded by their acquiescence but not by their help. To know that the conception of the

movement was wholly in the mind of God, as well as that his own position in the movement was designated by God, was an important, yes, necessary part of Moses' preparation. He was chosen, and the work was chosen, by God. When we are working on God's plans we can be sure we are not mistaken.

3. God *gave himself* as a special equipment to Moses: "Certainly I will be with thee" (v. 12). This supplied an element which Moses might easily have wondered about, unless it had been mentioned specifically: the power by means of which the plan for which he had been designated was to be carried out. This power was to be furnished by the immediate activity of the Almighty. To be appointed, to have the plan outlined, would have been a mockery, unless besides these Moses had been made equal to the work. Moses hesitated because of the vast work he was expected to do; but it turns out that God himself is to do it, and Moses is to be only the instrument or vehicle of the divine energy. Such empowerment was not necessary to Moses alone. Of the cares of daily life, the moral achievements necessary to us, the burdens and temptations and sorrows we must meet, it may well be asked, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The answer for us, as for Moses, is, "Immanuel"—God with us.

4. *Encouragement* was given to Moses by a sign: "and this shall be a token unto thee" (v. 12). To our minds such a sign as this would be no sign at all; for by a sign we understand a present demonstration, whereas this was future, so that Moses was to accept one future thing as the token of another. However, we must not project our modern conceptions into ancient minds. Moses did not understand God's sign in this case to be the

same sort of sign as the making his hand leprous. "This sign, which was to be a pledge to Moses of the success of his mission, was one indeed that required faith itself; but, at the same time, it was a sign adapted to inspire both courage and confidence. God pointed out to him the success of his mission, the certain result of his leading the people out: Israel should serve him upon the very same mountain in which he had appeared to Moses. The reality of the appearance of God formed the pledge of his announcement" (Keil). The sign was, then, a promise, whose verification was future, but whose guarantee was in the reality of the voice which uttered it. In the explicitness of this sign, and the obligation which God thereby assumed, Moses could not fail to receive encouragement during the time that the sign was awaiting fulfilment.

5. *Credentials* were given to Moses by which he was to impress himself and the genuineness of his mission upon Israel, and also (if it might be so) upon Pharaoh. These credentials were the name of God, specially given (v. 14). If those who wanted to be sure before they sanctioned the enterprise should ask Moses by whose authority he had taken up this seemingly impossible work, he was to say, "I AM hath sent me unto you." In our days names mean little compared to all they meant in ancient times. To the Jews the name and the man himself were almost identical. The special name of God which Moses was to give to the Israelites, which he would never have dared to invent, as they very well knew, was to make such an impression upon their devout minds that they would see it to be a token of Moses' supernatural calling. Perhaps the use of this name may have been accompanied by an unusual dignity and fervor in Moses'

presence. But it is not necessary for us to seek for credentials to the credentials, for the Israelites sought none. The name of God was recognized by them as authoritative. It is a splendid example of the truth witnessing to itself, and being accepted for its own sake and not for the sake of something outside itself. We know the sun in its own shining, and the name of God testified to itself and to Moses.

6. *A revelation of the being of God* was contained in this name, as well as a new nominal designation of God. Moses was equipped not only with a new word, but also with a new truth. The name was not arbitrary (like our names). It could not have been anything else than what it was, for there was an idea concerning the divine nature coming to expression in it. The interpretation of the name JEHOVAH (v. 16) is contained in the expression *I am*, and more fully in the other, *I am that I am* (v. 14). This is a bewildering form of statement to us, and sounds much like "I am what I am, and that cannot be known." But a Jew would not so misinterpret the meaning, which is, "I am that which is." Many theologians have explained this to mean "the self-existent one," and perhaps this is still the commonest explanation. But that is a Greek philosophical idea; true, no doubt, but to read it into this verse is to commit an anachronism. It is doubtful if a Jew would have understood what was meant by such an expression. To a Jew mere existence was unthinkable. Existence to him was always activity. Hence the meaning of "I am that I am" would seem to be "I am that which acts," "I am he that accomplishes," or "I am he that bringeth to pass." "Jehovah denotes *he that is*—*is* implying not one who barely exists, but one who asserts his being, and (unlike the false gods) enters into

personal relations with his worshippers" (Driver). "As it is not the idea of a *continuous existence* which lies in the verb *I am*, but that of *existence in motion*, of becoming and occurring, so also the form of the name, as derived from the imperfect, leads us to understand in it the existence of God, not as an existence at rest, but as one always becoming, always making itself known in a process of becoming. God is Jehovah in as far as he has entered into an *historical* relation to mankind, and in particular to the chosen people, Israel" (Oehler). The name Jehovah designates God as one "who is perpetually positing and manifesting himself, whose being, coming into appearance, is the supporting foundation and essential content of the universe and its history, and especially of the history of redemption" (Delitzsch). The name Jehovah was intended to be the proper name of the only God (as Elohim was the generic name). But it was more than a name (as we understand names), it was a definite revelation of the character of God; in this respect it shows him to be the *ever active one*, particularly with respect to his covenant people. To them he is ever giving revelations of himself, for them he is ever exerting his omnipotence. Jehovah is not the serene, impassive being who, to some minds, sits far away from the realms of men, careless of their happiness or woe; he is the friend of man; always glorifying their life by telling them of himself, always entering into their experiences; a very present help in trouble. When we remember the early age in history to which this sublime conception of the deity was given, and when we compare it with the ideas of the gods prevalent in civilized Egypt, we can see that it can have originated only in an immediate supernatural revelation. And what an equipment this was for Moses for his special mission!



God had been revealed to him as the one who accomplishes. Would he not accomplish the end for which he had called Moses? Would he not accomplish the liberation which he had promised to his people? When Moses gave to the Israelites this new truth about God, it roused their faith, kindled their hope, and made them believe anew in their divine destiny.

7. God *reminded Moses of his covenant* as another help to him in his mission (v. 15). The things God had done for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob seemed to have come to an end. There had been no revelation for four hundred years, no miracle, no sign of God's interest in his people. But the dark age was passed. The covenant God still lived. The help given to the patriarchs was still available. He who had done wonders could do wonders still. When we are perplexed as to the genuineness of God's helping of men, we have only to open the page of history to be reassured.

8. *The details of action* are all prescribed for Moses (vs. 16, 17). This timid soul like a child must have every step pointed out for him. And God condescends to his weakness and self-distrust. "Go, and gather."

9. Even *the very words* are put upon his lips, which he is to say (vs. 16, 17). He is to tell Israel of the vision at the bush: that it was the covenant-making and keeping God; that He knew all about the bondage; that He would rescue them, and transplant them to a rich country. Moses would hardly have shaped his thoughts into such an optimistic message; it was too daring for him. But he could repeat God's words and throw the responsibility of them upon God. Those who would do God's work find the words of God best for their lips. The breadth of the promises of God is too great for us to express otherwise

than in the very utterance of the Almighty. Then and then only can men be led to believe them.

10. *Hardships were foretold* to Moses, lest by not anticipating them he should be discouraged at the first show of opposition (v. 19). He knew in advance that Pharaoh would refuse to let Israel go. If he might have suspected this naturally, his knowing it positively by the word of God made him all the more prepared for it. And there was reassurance for him while confronting Pharaoh by remembering that Jehovah had promised success with Pharaoh's opposition distinctly in mind. We cannot but be reminded of Christ's frank words to his disciples telling them of all the troubles which awaited them as his followers.

11. The *distinct promise of liberty* crowns God's preparation of Israel's leader: "and after that he will let you go" (v. 20). God himself will put forth his hand and do wonders against Egypt and the liberation shall be achieved. At the beginning of Jehovah's preparation of Moses the purpose of the call was made plain, then details were filled in at length, and now at the close the purpose of it all is again declared. This intervention of detail may have served to inform Moses that the liberation would not come in the twinkling of an eye, but only after a long struggle. Yet it would come at last. The intervening details having been enumerated, the conclusion at last is reached. There might be trials, but after them would surely come the triumph. If a man could know that there was absolute certainty of success in any large enterprise intervening difficulties would seem trivial, however great actually. In God's work we have such an assurance. Therefore all things can be endured. The suffering will be eclipsed by the far more exceeding weight of glory.

All the steps of God's preparation of Moses have their lessons for us, but some are especially significant. We learn here that :

1. The only right mission for us is that in which we are called of God. To go up without the direction of God is to go up to failure. Plainly God points out to us the way in which we should walk. Duty is in no wise obscure in its large elements. Special work God lays upon us for the blessing of men. The gospel command rests upon us all. Along these lines we should spend our lives. There lies success.

2. God reveals himself as our helper. His name is Jehovah—the God who accomplishes. Difficulties confront us constantly, not as large perhaps as those of Moses, but quite as adequate to disturb our hearts. But we need not worry. Jehovah is our friend, and while we trust him will make all things work together for our good.

3. To those who live in God there can be no ultimate failure. There may be obstacles, misfortunes of every sort, but the crown of victory is already laid up for them, awaiting God's time. The certainty of Moses' triumph is in no wise different from the certainty of ours, for both go back to that eternal Jehovah who doeth that which he pleaseth and is the same forever.

## THE PASSOVER INSTITUTED.

EXODUS 12:1-14

THERE are times in history when, ritualism having been caried to an excess, there is a reaction, and all rites and ceremonies are abhorred. At one extreme we see one class making every elaboration possible of the services of the sanctuary; at the other extreme those who hold such an attenuated spirituality that all outward acts are held as meaningless, and only the acts of the soul profitable. But men are not wholly bodily, so that external ceremonies are in themselves worthy and sufficient, nor are they wholly spiritual, so that external acts mean nothing. We are both body and spirit, and the institution of sacraments in both the old economy and the new is God's recognition of man's dual nature, and his accommodation of truth to it. There could not have well been a more elaborate ceremonial system than that given to the Jews. They were living in the infancy of history, and spiritual truths had to be dressed up in material facts in order that their minds might be impressed. Spiritual truth spiritually expressed would have been beyond them. Yet always they were led to see that every ceremonial act had a meaning beyond itself, its chief import was spiritual. On the other hand, no religious system could be more absolutely bare of external adornment than that which Christ gave to the world. The elaborate ceremonialism of the Old Testament (having served its temporary purpose and been fulfilled) was supplanted by the simplest and most spiritual form of religious service. And yet,

while emphasizing the spirituality of worship, and protesting against the elaborate ritualism of his day, Christ enjoined upon his followers to observe two sacraments. What is this but a thoughtful concession to our bodily existence? However spiritually minded we may be, none of us is beyond being influenced through the senses in some degree. Our blessed Lord seems to have been mindful of this fact, and to have condescended to our weakness. So he has left us two simple ceremonies, not splendid and distracting, and yet adequate to answer whatever need any enlightened soul may feel for some external symbol of spiritual things. If we are ever inclined to underestimate the Jewish system of rites, and to think slightly of such a thing as the passover, let us remember that the same wisdom established that which gave us baptism and the Lord's supper. The intellectual, spiritual, and historical value of the divinely instituted memorials of both covenants is very great.

As it is necessary for us to understand the intention and meaning of the Lord's supper in order to avoid mistake concerning it and to secure the accomplishment of its end in us, so, in order to understand the ceremonial life of God's ancient people, we must know what the passover meant.

1. The Passover or Paschal lamb was a SACRIFICE. This is emphasized especially by the Roman Catholic church in order to sustain their theory that the mass, the celebration of the Lord's supper, is a sacrifice. To them the Lord's supper is not a memorial of a sacrifice once made for all, but a true sacrifice repeated constantly. To correct this misapprehension, this over-exaltation of Christ's simple memorial feast, the Reformers felt bound to deny that the passover was in any sense a sacrifice.

The heat of the controversy being past, and the need of discovering many arguments for the correct historical view of the Lord's supper having disappeared, we are prepared to see what the Reformers hesitated to see, that the passover was a sacrifice. We do not endanger any truth whatever by this admission, for there were many other sacrifices, true sacrifices, under the old economy, but they all (the passover included) pointed to the one great sacrifice made on Calvary, which did away with the further need of any of them, of whatsoever sort.

The passover was a *sin-offering*. The sprinkling of the blood upon the lintel and the door-posts was a sign of the purification of that house for God. It separated it from the houses of the Egyptians and the houses of such Israelites as preferred to cast in their lot with idolatrous Egypt. It marked the habitations of such as had their faith reckoned unto them for righteousness. It is true that this idea is not conveyed in the passage which describes for us the institution of the passover. But we are entitled to interpret the passover at its origin by its later meaning, and the meaning of the whole ritualistic system which grew up about it, and also by the light which is thrown back upon it from the New Testament. We are not mistaken, then, in thinking that "the passover presupposes an act of expiation effected by the application of the blood of the paschal lamb" (Oehler). We see emerging here, at the very beginning of the Israelitish national life, the thought which always dominated its worship, and to-day controls the worship of the Christian world, that sin needs to be "covered" with blood. The blood on the lintel marked the house where provision had been made against sin.

*Obedience* was also signified in the passover. Here

was a sacrifice not only of an animal, but also of that service to God which is even more pleasing to him. Where the blood was not found it was known that there was no faith in Jehovah and no intention of serving him. Where the blood was found it was evidence of hearts loyal to him. The external mark pointed to an internal obedience. We are apt to overlook this. That the destroying angel should distinguish between houses marked with blood and those not so marked seems trivial. But the blood was a vivid evidence of respect for the law of the Lord. It was a just sign of belonging, not by blood alone, but also by condition of heart, to the people of God. There are some who think they can be just as good Christians without uniting with the church and partaking of the Lord's supper. Yet Christ laid upon us, not as a request but as a command, the injunction, "This do in remembrance of me." Can one be a good Christian and at the same time deliberately neglect the command of Christ? No matter if the thing commanded seems unessential. The blood on the lintel in itself may have seemed unessential to the Israelites, but it was necessary as a part of their obedience to God.

The *priest* was the father, the head of the household. He slew the lamb and sprinkled the doorposts. Afterward the sacrificial function was differentiated and special priests were appointed. But as yet the father was the only priest known, and his service represented that of the whole household. So that really Israel is here pictured to us as "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:7). This thought was perpetuated even when the Levitical priesthood had been established. The head of the family (and not the official priest) always slew the passover lamb. The thought that every Israelite was a

priest unto God was thus made permanent—a thought which is not to be forgotten by those who are the Israel of God according to the Spirit (1 Peter 2 : 5, 9). We are too inclined to depute our priestly functions to others. But spiritual sacrifices should go up from the heart of every one of us as genuine to us and to God as the lamb offered by the head of the Jewish home, acting for all, on the passover night.

2. The Passover was a CONSECRATION. It really comprised two sorts of sacrifice which were afterward separated in special offerings: the sin-offering and the peace-offering. The sin-offering took away the obstacle which interfered with man's relation to God. The peace-offering was a "eucharistic offering," a sign of thanksgiving to God, and, by being partaken of by the offerer, betokened his fellowship with God. This implied that right relations had been established with God, and that one was living in full enjoyment of them and their privileges. The Lord's supper, which represents the passover to us, is not only a symbol of an atonement made for sin, but a "communion," a uniting of ourselves to God in Christ in spiritual fellowship.

*Completeness* of consecration to God was designated by two characteristics of the passover: the faultlessness of the sacrifice ("without blemish") and the burning of all that remained after the feast. The best thing possible must be brought to God in this service, and it must be used for this service and nothing else. The burning of the remainder was afterwards separated into a special sacrificial act—the whole burnt offering—when the whole animal was consumed by fire as a symbol of the consecration of the whole man to God. How could the Israelites on the passover night fail to think of themselves as belonging



specially to God? The thought of his ownership of them was the most vivid of all suggestions arising from their situation. But his ownership of them had as its correlate their ownership of him; they accepted him as their God and gave themselves to his service. Naturally nothing but a complete sacrifice of self could be acceptable to him. And is it not so still?

*Severance* inwardly from the seductions of Egypt was indicated by the passover. The sacrificial meal, shared only by those who belonged to Jehovah, the mark on the door, designating only such as had resolved to obey him, were signs of separation from the people about them. And the separation was not only from the people but from what the people stood for—the idolatry, the worldliness, of the nations who knew not God. Israel was cutting loose not only from the people but also from the life of Egypt. They were called to be a separate people; separate from others physically in order to that moral and spiritual separation which was far more important. As often as this rite was celebrated they might be reminded that they were called to be a peculiar people, cut off from the rest of the world that they might be preserved unto God.

*Communion with God* was secured in this ceremony. The purifying sign was set over the door which seemed to mark the house not only for the exemption of the destroyer but also for the visitation of Jehovah. God had promised Moses, when he called him as leader of the people, that he himself would be with them. Was it not certain, at this hour of preparation, when the Israelites were marking themselves as belonging to God, and were dedicating themselves to him and his service, that God would fulfil the promise made to Moses? When did they need God more than at this evening time when they were preparing

themselves for escape? They ate the meal not only with one another, but, if we may say so, with God as well. And in the Lord's supper we have communion with God.

The *family* was especially recognized in all this procedure. Its limits defined the area of the group who conducted the celebration. Its head, one acting for all, made the sacrifice and marked the home for God. All Israelitish life is founded on the thought that man is a social being. Pure individualism is unknown to it. Man succeeds, fails, sins, serves God, not for himself alone but for others who are members with him in one body. Individualism has ruled men's thinking about themselves for a long time, but now in our sociological studies we are coming to a new appreciation of the old Jewish idea, which, indeed, was less Jewish than divine. To the Jew the family was the centre of life. When we return to this idea will it not be to gain new strength and blessing? Think how little a part of men's thoughts is given to the concerns of home. Home is often nothing more than an abode; it is not an institution, not the chief situation in living. To plan deliberately to make home the pleasantest, most interesting, most helpful, most necessary place to one's healthy moral and spiritual existence is to take up a method devised of God, which is certain to result in blessing. The home as the centre of life, and religion as the centre of the home—this is God's way of training and strengthening us for his service.

3. The Passover was a MEMORIAL. This was its most patent object, the one which cannot escape our observation. The other meanings of it have been named first because we are apt to overlook them.

As a *commemoration* the passover looked specifically to one event. It was not a general institutional testimo-

nial to the goodness of God; it referred to one occurrence—the escape from destruction when the visitation fell upon the first-born of Egypt. There was no vagueness or indefiniteness about this celebration. It pointed back to one thing as directly as Pepys' yearly celebration of his escape from death through a surgical operation, or our celebration on Independence Day of our escape into national existence. Such a unique meaning in the passover made it different entirely from a general thanksgiving. Its historical meaning was more vivid, and its personal application was more acute. We remind ourselves also that the Lord's supper commemorates a special event which occurred on a definite day in a definite year. We stand upon history and look up to God in thanksgiving.

*National life* began with the passover. In general its celebration called to mind the escape from Egypt (of which the passing-by of the death angel was a part). It was a birthday keeping among the Jews. "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel . . . thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea" (Isa. 43: 1, 16). The time when the creating was done was when the way was made through the sea. Israel was educated gradually for God, but it was born in a day. As we on our birthdays may perhaps remember to thank God for existence, so Israel in celebrating the passover might thank God for having given them national being then. And in the Lord's supper we celebrate our second birth.

The *beginning of the year* was designated by the passover (v. 2). Time was consecrated to God. The years came from him, belonged to him, and were meant to be used for him. The beginning of the Jewish year

was at the season when the hope of harvest was occupying the mind. The connection of the passover with it seemed to remind the people that not only the escape from Egypt but the prosperity of every passing year was due to Jehovah. Whatever they had, whatever time was bestowed upon them, came from him who was their everlasting guardian.

This memorial was *perpetual*. It was a celebration not only for the exodus time but for all the long ages of Jewish history (v. 14). The value of such a memorial is very great. It gives an external support to faith, it is a testimonial to the truth of religion, it is a sign of duty, a pledge of help, a bond of national unity, a perpetuator of national existence. The stability of the Jews has been due in no slight degree to their peculiar customs—including the passover. And the persistence of the Christian church has been aided largely by its sacraments, which are historical memorials as well as spiritual helps.

In studying the passover upon its many sides, as a sacrifice, a consecration, and a memorial, we cannot fail to have impressed more deeply upon us the meaning of our Passover. We have our sacrifice too, not made yearly, but made once for all and commemorated in our feast; there we too consecrate ourselves to God; there we perpetuate, until he comes, the memory of him who is God's Passover sacrifice for us. All our studies of Jewish life and habits have value only as they throw light upon our own relation to Christ. Everything precious conveyed to the Jew in the passover should be conveyed to us in the Lord's supper. "Therefore let us keep the feast."

## PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA.

EXODUS 14 : 19-29.

THE Exodus was the most dramatic and imposing occurrence in the history of the Hebrews. We do not forget God's solemn calling of Abraham, nor the giving of the law in the days when the lightning-riven clouds rested on Sinai, nor the crossing of Jordan, nor the day of blessing and cursing upon Ebal and Gerizim, nor the dedication of the temple, nor any other of the stirring events which marked the unusual history of God's unusual people. But among them all there is none so capable of rousing the imagination and kindling a thrilling enthusiasm as the story of the escape from Egypt, when the Lord triumphed gloriously and cast the horse and his rider into the sea. That the effect upon our minds is a reproduction of that made upon the Israelites themselves is evident from the way in which the song of Moses is echoed and reechoed all through the Old Testament.

One might spend much time in studying questions about the Exodus. Where was the Red Sea crossed? There are many theories, but "the amount of discussion shows that there is no one place which has established for itself a claim to be regarded as the veritable place of passage beyond all reasonable doubt" (Macgregor). The shifting of the sands about the Red Sea has made its outline different from what it once was. But even if it had remained unaltered, it is unlikely that we should be able to determine the place of crossing. The way in which the waters were divided and held back by the wind has

exercised the ingenuity of many minds (as "the direction of the wind when Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee" has exercised other minds—see the Expository Times, April, 1893). Some have puzzled their brains over the difficulty of carrying two millions of people (including women and children) with their flocks and herds and all their belongings over a difficult road-bed in so short a time. Laborde guessed that the number of fighting men had been written 600,000 for 600 by mistake. Some have found relief by calling attention to the recorded flight of 400,000 Tartars in a single night from Russia into China, at the end of the last century. These preliminary matters might be treated at great length, but it is not so important to study about the Exodus as to study the Exodus itself.

#### 1. THE EVENT.

It was a time of *need*, a most critical moment in the history of the people of God, when this escape was opened up to them. Moses had carried out the directions of God and the plagues had fallen on Egypt. Toward the Israelites the Egyptians could have henceforth feelings of only the bitterest hatred. If Israel had had to remain, the bondage would have been a hundred-fold more full of anguish for them. Before them lay the sea, which they had no visible means of crossing. The permission to depart had been extorted from Pharaoh in such a way that a change of mind was inevitable; already his chariots were behind them in hot pursuit, and the Israelites had no weapons of defence. "They were like a mouse in a trap or a partridge in a snare" (Luther). They seemed to be driven into a corner where extermination would be inevitable. At no time had they ever been in so desperate a situation.

An *answer* to their need was given just at this critical moment. The angel of God who had been their guide now changed his function and became their rearward, using as his implement that pillar of cloud which now became a covering to bewilder the pursuers and conceal the pursued. The Israelites were obeying the command of God in leaving Egypt, and they were depending on the promise of God that he would bring them forth in safety (chap. 6:6). They had not brought themselves into this difficulty, neither were they responsible for finding a way out of it. But they need not worry. For every time of want there is an adequate answer to him who is engaged in serving God. Abraham needed to find a way out of his dilemma when he was raising the knife over Isaac, and his need was answered.

*Miracles* were wrought here in abundance. The angel's presence was supernatural, so was the pillar of cloud and fire. Miraculously this miraculous pillar changed its office, the sea divided, the passage was made, the Egyptians were thrown into tumult, their chariot wheels were impeded, the water returned overwhelmingly. All was miraculous. The extraordinary character of the event was marked by this unusual accumulation of supernatural incidents. These remarkable experiences must have been no less impressive to the minds of the Israelites than to the Egyptians. Four hundred years there had been no revelation of God, no work of supernatural power. Now everything was miraculous, and no sooner had one step of advance been secured in this marvellous way than a new step succeeded similarly. The effect of this sequence of miracles must have been overpowering.

*God was the author* evidently of this mighty work of rescue. No credit thereafter for it could be given to the

statesmanship of the leader, or the heroism of the people. Whatever glory belonged to the Exodus was God's, and his alone. His right hand had gotten them the victory. The scene we know was terribly impressive to the Israelites from the memory of it preserved to us in Psalm 77: "The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee, they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook." In the midst of this terrific storm how must the trembling Israelites have been humbled with a sense of their weakness; how must they have been impressed with the awful power and glory of Jehovah!

*Means were used* in the accomplishment of the deliverance, and yet not to the belittlement of the miraculous element. The cloud, the fire, the wind, the sea, the outstretched hand of Moses, all figured in the event. And yet who could think for a moment that these things were its cause? Did a wind ever make the sea stand up like a wall naturally? Nature was a participant in the scene of the Exodus, but in a supernatural aspect. God's use of means does not lessen the degree of his authorship of miracles. We always bring ourselves into difficulty by trying to analyze the proportion of natural and supernatural in any miracle. Even if we knew, we should have to say anyway, "All is of God."

*The enemy was overthrown.* That was the crowning element in the episode of the crossing of the Red Sea. It was not a necessity of topography so much as a necessity of war which made the crushing of the Egyptians necessary. If Pharaoh had not pursued possibly Israel might have emigrated in some circuitous and perfectly natural



way. But the Egyptians had set themselves up as the enemies of God, so that the Exodus must needs have a double aspect: that of favor to the friends of God, and that of punishment to God's foes. The revelation of God made in the plagues was adequate to have turned Egypt to the true religion if its heart had not been hardened. But it knew not the day of its visitation. It sinned away its hour of grace, and the just judgment of God fell upon it.

2. THE MEANING of the occurrence. In the lives of nations, as in the lives of men, all things have a bearing on the whole trend of existence and character. Especially did the Exodus have significance in Jewish history.

*Safety* for the people of God was thereby secured. If Israel had been left in Egypt, unhelped by God, we can hardly imagine that it would have had any great future. Without God, the national increase would have been smaller, national peculiarities and the national isolation because of them would have slowly disappeared, and in time probably Israel would have been absorbed into the peasantry of the empire. But God kept them separate and prospered them. When their prosperity became so great as to endanger their existence he took them out of the hands of the tyrant who threatened to suppress them and secured their future. Nations, like men, must live before they can do. Life was secured to Israel in the Exodus. Afterwards other things might come.

*Freedom* was secured in the Exodus. A nation may have life, but little more. Yet the more is precisely what every nation wants, and the first advance into it is made when freedom is secured. If Pharaoh had only been

rebuked so severely that he would have left Israel alone, but they had still remained in a mollified bondage, the end of their existence would have been thwarted. They needed to get away from the mastery of any king, however beneficent. That individualism among nations which God meant to secure for them could emerge only in the air of liberty. Kind-hearted kings and their supporters have often argued that a mild monarchy is the best form of government. And yet history shows that national individuality develops only as monarchy is discarded or reduced to emptiness. The Jews needed to have their own way with themselves entirely as a nation in order to serve God's purpose. Freedom was indispensable.

*National life* with its special characteristics was begun at the Exodus. "They had passed in that night from Africa to Asia; they had crossed one of the great boundaries which divide the quarters of the world; a thought always thrilling, how much more when we reflect what a transition it involved to them. Behind the African hills, which rose beyond the Red Sea, lay the strange land of their exile and bondage, the land of Egypt, with its mighty river, its immense buildings, its monster-worship, its grinding tyranny, its overgrown civilization" (Stanley). Israel had been brought to Egypt for a special tuition, and there were some necessary elements of civilized life which were learned there; but no one would say that the type of national life which appeared in the Jews was in any of its chief elements in the least like those of Egypt. Israel was to be a nation serving Jehovah as its real, nominal, though unseen king. The tendencies of the nation in this direction had been heretofore repressed; now they were released to full activity. Now Jehovah could be served freely. The Exodus was

the opening of the possibility of Israel's being that which it was meant to be.

*Growth* numerically was made possible in the new life. The extraordinary increase of the people during the bondage was secured miraculously and only as a preparation for a vigorous exodus. It was abnormal. God desired to set his people in a fair land, among fields and vineyards and pastures, where at last they might become mighty and make an international impression. The testimony which Israel was destined to offer to history required something more than a feeble folk. National impressiveness must be secured. Leaving Egypt was preliminary to the possession of Canaan. Release was not for the sake of release, but for the sake of progress.

As a revelation of *Jehovah* the Exodus had special significance. An impression of him was made on Egypt (v. 25) but too late for its blessing. The impression which had historic value was that made on the Israelites. This being connected always with the origin of their national existence, and being perpetually brought to mind in the recurring celebration of the passover, never disappeared from the national consciousness. God wanted Israel to know that they were his chosen people, and he impressed that on them in the Exodus in such a vivid way that they could not forget it. Nor could they forget that the God who had made them was a God of power, dwelling amid thundering clouds, and controlling the course of nature by his omnipotence. So their hearts were inclined to that reverential fear which becomes the hearts of men, but which God finds in few. "And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord, and in his servant Moses" (14: 31).

## THE LESSONS TO US of the Exodus.

*Providence waits for the right time* before helping us in our difficulties. When every avenue of escape seems closed, and our own resources are exhausted, the Lord our helper appears upon the scene. This is not to deny that God is always with us and always helping us, as he was with the Israelites all the time before the Exodus. But sometimes we are in critical situations where we need more special, peculiar and powerful aid than we require in our ordinarily quiet and uneventful days. In such trying hours, when our souls are exceeding heavy, God never fails us if we look to him for help. This is one of the most precious truths of religious experience, which is verified in the life of every heart of faith.

*God's ways are mysterious.* The Israelites never knew how God held back the waves of the sea, how he made the pillar of cloud and fire so serviceable, how he discomfited Pharaoh and his host. Everything was miraculous, which it could not have been without mystery. For that out of which the mystery is taken is no longer miraculous. God's "footsteps were not known" to them, nor are they to us. "He knows the way he takes," but we do not know. This is but to say that we are living by faith and not by sight. We say that to ourselves constantly, and yet we are all the time acting as though the converse were true. When strange things happen to us, experiences which do not fit into our ideas of cause and effect, and of moral desert, we are puzzled, and sometimes perhaps feel shaken in faith. But we ought always to expect strange things from God. Why should not the wisdom of omnipotent love often seem strange to us?

*The double aspect of God's entrance into human life*

is pointedly marked in the Exodus. The pillar of cloud and fire was a blessing to Israel but a curse to Egypt. "It was a guide and light to the believing, but a darkness and terror to the unbelieving" (Cheever). "Our God is a consuming fire." To the gold this is a beneficent purifier, but to the dross it is destruction. "So every revelation is either light or darkness to men, according to the use they make of it. The ark, which slew Philistines, and flung Dagon prone on his own threshold, brought blessing to the house of Obed-edom. The child who was 'set for the fall,' was also for 'the rising of many.' The stone laid in Zion is 'a sure foundation,' and 'a stone of stumbling.' The gospel is the savor of life unto life, or of death unto death" (McLaren).

*Help was given for an end beyond itself.* Israel was saved that it might serve the Lord. God gives man existence, yet not for mere existence' sake. God blesses us with countless gifts, which we are to use for purposes other than the using. God saves us by his Son, not that we may quietly rest in idleness in the knowledge that we are saved, but that we may lead holy lives and do the will of God. Israel is brought out of Egypt because God has a work for it to do. And every blessing we receive from God, every offer of his help in our hours of need, is to the end that we may be made equal to his service. The end of our lives is not the accomplishment of our will, but of his.

*Israel was baptized* unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10:2), that is, "to follow Moses as a leader" (Thayer). And yet Paul plainly has a deeper meaning in mind than this. To him "Moses represented Christ" (J. C. Edwards). So that passage of the Red Sea was a sort of anticipation of Christian baptism, the

sign of our passage out of the old life of bondage to sin into the new life of liberty in Christ. The ancient and the new Israel are one spiritually. And God leads both into freedom of holy service towards him. Have we let God give us our spiritual Exodus? Have we escaped the slavery of evil and are we enjoying the gladness of the Christian life? Then we can join now, as we may join in the heavenly realm, in the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3).

“I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously ;  
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea .  
The Lord is my strength and my song,  
And he is become my salvation.  
This is my God, and I will praise him ;  
My father's God, and I will exalt him.  
The Lord is a man of war :  
The Lord is his name. . . .  
Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power,  
Thy right hand, O Lord, dasheth in pieces the enemy. . . .  
Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods ?  
Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness,  
Fearful in praises, doing wonders ?”

## THE ANOINTED KING.

PSA. 2:1-12.

THERE are psalms of peace and there are also psalms of war. The Second Psalm belongs among the latter. It resounds with the clangor of arms. Whole nations march out to the battlefield and struggle against God's King. But they forget God, and yet he it is who decides all warfare, including this. So that there can be but one end to the strife—the triumph of the Lord's Anointed.

It is possible that the Psalm may have been suggested by some incident in the history of the Israelitish kingdom. Two points seem to be settled: that the war was an uprising of vassal and not independent kings: it was a rebellion (v. 3); also that the gathering was made at Jerusalem (v. 6). Such an uprising has been sought for in the wars of David, with the Philistines at his ascension (too small), or the Ammonites and Syrians (2 Sam. 10:6) (no assembling at Jerusalem), or his rebellious son and his friends (not a vassal nation). Solomon might perhaps satisfy the imposing description given of the king, but there were no such wars in his reign. The episode has been sought in the reigns of Uzziah, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, but no war known to us satisfies the conditions. It is very likely that there was some historical basis for this Psalm, but we cannot determine what it was. What is certain is that the Psalm is prophetic and ideal, either with or without (Cheyne) a historical basis. Even the Jewish commentators (who, in the interest of antagonism to Christianity, reduce all definite Messianic references in the Old

Testament to a minimum) consider this a Messianic Psalm. The prophetic side is certainly illustrated in the agreement made between Pontius Pilate and Herod against Jesus Christ; it has also evidently a progressive fulfilment in the enmity of the world to the church; and it may point to some sort of a supreme culminating revolt which may make the final triumph of Christ more evident and glorious.

The Psalm is strikingly dramatic in arrangement. There are four strophes: 1, the description of the conspiracy and the Psalmist's expression of astonishment (vs. 1-3); 2, the attitude of Jehovah (vs. 4-6); 3, the king speaks and justifies his kingship (vs. 7-9); 4, the Psalmist counsels the rebels to submit (vs. 10-12).

Verses 1-6 have been noticed as "a specimen of the utmost art of Hebrew poetry" (Cheyne). The splendid force of the Psalm cannot escape our recognition. We do not wonder that of all the Psalms it is most frequently quoted in the New Testament.

1. The conspiracy against Jehovah's king and the astonishment of the poet (vs. 1-3). Here is a strong picture of an uprising (in sheer self-will, not for cause) of the *nations* (not the "heathen") against the kingdom of God. They *rage* like a hurrying turbulent crowd. Yet of course their plot is *vain*, because it is against Jehovah. "'In this word' (*vain*), says Luther, 'is comprised the argument of nearly the whole Psalm'" (Perowne). When Peter and John, after having been released from that prison into which they had been thrown for healing the lame man, "went to their own company" and told of the attempt of the chief priests and elders to frighten them into silence concerning Christ, the whole company recognized this opposition as an indication of the fulfilment of



the prediction in the Second Psalm of antagonism against God and his Messiah (Acts 4:24-28). In this vain attempt the kings of the earth *set themselves*, i. e., take a determined defiant attitude (see 1 Sam. 17:16; Num. 22:22), against *the Lord and against his Anointed*, for whoever is an enemy of God's king is also an enemy of God himself. The security of Christ's kingdom is assured because it stands in the security of God. This passage is of unusual interest as furnishing the chief source of the title *Messiah* (the Anointed *par excellence*) as a designation of the Saviour-king, who was promised as a redeemer for God's people. The adjective *anointed* is used often in the Old Testament, but never as a *proper name*, such as we see it to be in the New Testament (Gesenius, Cremer, Thayer, Westcott, etc.). Between the Old and New Testaments it had come to have this special meaning, and the passages in the Old Testament which were relied upon to warrant it were Daniel 9:26 and Psalm 2:2. We think of Jesus rather as the Saviour than as the Messiah, because our minds dwell little on the old Jewish hopes (in evidence of which we may note the little attention which is given to ancient prophecy). Yet we are to remember that the Messiah is one of the noblest of the names and attributes of Jesus, and we may keep in mind the Second Psalm as one of the two Scriptural passages out of which that idea was developed. The Psalmist graphically describes the self-confident words of the conspirators against God and his anointed king. "Let us break asunder the ties of government which bind us to God and his king." They sought a freedom that was hostile to God (v. 3).

2. The attitude of Jehovah (vs. 4-6). From the turmoil of the rebellious earth the Psalmist turns to heaven

to see what God will do. Here is an awful picture of God. We can hardly conceive of the laughter of the deity. No one but an inspired writer would have ventured on so daring a figure. An immensely important thought is hidden in this picture of God : that it is ridiculous for the creature to exalt himself against the Creator. God sees the infinite contrast between Him and these rebellious kings, and therefore the absurdity of their sin against him. If man could only see how contemptible any attempt upon his part against God really is, he would see why sin so often in God's Word is called folly. The sinner is not only guilty, but he is a fool, he is ridiculous. God holds those *in derision* who rise up against him, while he lets them go on in their futile course. But God's time of waiting ends. The hour of doom strikes. After long patience Jehovah *speaks*, and *in wrath*, and his *displeasure* falls upon them, causing vast *trouble*. It has been remarked that the rhythm of the poetry changes here and rolls like thunder, to express the dreadfulness of God's coming in anger. The first strophe ended with the defiant words of the rebels ; the second ends with the answering words of God. Supplying the ellipsis, we may make the meaning something like this : "Plot all ye will against me" (Perowne), or, "Ye think ye have right to throw off my government" (Cheyne), "yet have I established my King upon my holy hill of Zion" (and no power shall overthrow him). "I, God Almighty, am the one against whom you are rebelling, and this is *my* King whom you are fighting against." The emphasis is strong on the pronoun, indicating the deep meaning of the intervention of the Godhead.

3. The King speaks and justifies his kingship (vs. 7-9). Being attacked he must defend his title to reign.

He shows that it is doubly strong: by reason of the implied (and unmentioned) right of inheritance, and (lest there should be any question) by reason of a special imperial decree issued by God for the direct purpose of making the occupancy of the throne unquestionable. The *decree* spoken of here is pictorial; there is no reference to the theological doctrine of the divine decree (though of course God decreed, in that sense, the kingship of Jesus as he decrees "whatsoever cometh to pass"). The direct application of this passage to the kingship of Jesus is made in Heb. 5:5. The imperial decree of God (like the rescript of a Roman emperor or the ukase of a Czar) which proclaimed God's will concerning the kingship, named the anointed one his *Son*. He was thus placed in the high relation in which all the Davidic kings stood to God (see 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:26, 27). This sonship means that the right and power of his kingship come from God. *This day*, God said to him, i. e., this day of coronation, of anointing, *I have begotten thee*. The word *begotten* refers (as it might have referred in the case of any Davidic king of whom the same expression might have been used) to the manifestation of sonship by the investiture with the government. In the case of Jesus this was fulfilled, we are told, by his resurrection (Rom. 1:4; Acts 13:33). "The original passage (Ps. 2:7) refers, not to the incarnation of the Messiah, but to his inauguration, or public acknowledgement on the part of God as the rightful Sovereign of men. To no moment in the history of Christ would such a prediction apply with such significance as to that of his triumphant resurrection from the dead" (Hackett). We are not warranted in finding the theological doctrine of the eternal generation of the second person of the Trinity in this passage (Shedd),

which may be worked out rather on philosophical grounds. "This passage, I am aware, has been explained by many as referring to the eternal generation of Christ; and from the words *this day* they have reasoned ingeniously as if they denoted an eternal act without any relation to time. But Paul, who is a more faithful and a better qualified interpreter of this prophecy, in Acts 13:33 calls our attention to the manifestation of the heavenly glory of Christ of which I have spoken. This expression, *to be begotten*, does not therefore imply that he then began to be the Son of God, but that his being so was then made manifest to the world" (Calvin). Nevertheless, while the word *begotten* here is used figuratively, we are not to forget that this Psalm reaches its fulfilment in one who is not only begotten of God in the sense of being publicly recognized as his chosen king, but is also the Son of God in a sense in which no other king who ever lived could be called a son of God, by reason of a real personal relation of sonship which has existed from all eternity, a real "community of nature" (T. W. Chambers). On the day when God issued the proclamation establishing the kingship of his Anointed, and declaring it to be authorized by him by calling the anointed his Son, he said to him also that all the nations, even to *the uttermost parts of the earth*, were to be his possession, and that, in their rebelliousness, he should crush them into submission as though with *a rod of iron*. "Not to be explained as a description of the habitually severe rule of the Messiah, but as a prophecy of what must happen if the nations persist in revolting from the appointed King" (Cheyne). "It is true, the beauty and glory of the kingdom of which David speaks are more illustriously displayed when a willing people run to Christ in the day of his power, to show

themselves his obedient subjects; but as the greater part of men rise up against him with a violence which spurns all restraint, it was necessary to add the truth, that this king would prove himself superior to all such opposition" (Calvin). Christ is called "the prince of peace" and his mission is to bring joy to the world. Yet, because of men's hostility, he comes bringing the sword (Matt. 10: 34). War is sometimes necessary to peace. The offer of submissive citizenship is made so that every man may accept it. But if it be spurned, or treated with contemptuous neglect, then there remains the terrible experience of "the wrath of the Lamb." In holding forth before men the picture of the pleading Christ with one hand, we must warn them faithfully by holding forth the picture of the judging Christ with the other. Rev. 2: 26, 27; 12: 1-5; 19: 11-15; Matt. 21: 44; 24: 50-51; Luke 19: 29.

4. The Psalmist counsels the rebels to submit (vs. 10-12). *Now, therefore*, in view of what has been said, the kings should be *wise* and *instructed*, both religiously and politically; for the two went together in the ancient Jewish mind: to rebel against the king was to rebel against God. *Serve the Lord* (by obedience to his Anointed) *with fear, and rejoice with trembling*. A strong combination of feelings, yet not impossible to be understood. "What is meant is *horror honoris*, mixed with *tremor amoris*" (Delitzsch). The rejoicing is to be over being God's subjects. They are also to *render sincere homage* ("worship in purity," margin R. V., "kiss the son," A. V.), lest *Jehovah be angry* and *they perish* on their way. The passage is difficult. If the writer meant to say "kiss (or render homage to) the son," why did he not use the Hebrew word for son which he had just used in v. 7, instead of a very late Aramaic word? This Aramaic word for

son is, however, a legitimate old Hebrew word meaning purely or sincerely, so that the natural meaning is, *render sincere homage*. Lest they might be tempted to trifle in so serious a matter, they are warned that Jehovah's *wrath might be kindled easily*. On the other hand they are told that *blessed are all they that put their trust in him*, i. e., that obey him and his anointed.

The practical lessons of this grand Psalm are *historical* and *personal*.

*Historical lessons.*

1. There is apt to be antagonism between the powers of this world and the kingdom of God. "As often as the world rages, in order to disturb and put an end to the prosperity of Christ's kingdom, we have only to remember that, in all this, there is just a fulfilment of what was long ago predicted, and no changes that can happen will greatly disquiet us" (Calvin). At various times in history, as in the days of Nero and Philip II. and Catharine de' Medici, the powers of the world have been set against the kingdom of God. We do not see this so now, except in heathen lands. Yet the forces which are at work in society are often set against the progress of the cause of God. At this we should not be surprised.

2. Christ's kingdom is divine. It is he of whom the Second Psalm particularly speaks. The kingdoms of this world are powerless against God's King of kings, and all the hostile forces of social life are incapable of preventing the spread of his glorious dominion. The power of Omnipotence is back of him; yes, it is in him, for he is God. The divine kingdom among men represents God's age-long purpose for humanity. It is the end for which history is. The promise of God to the patriarchs is in it

consummated. It is the focus of all onward movements. It is God's wish for us.

3. The certainty of its triumph is plain. It is not a matter of doubt. God wants his kingdom to succeed, and that want is history. The failure of the divine purpose is inconceivable. With this we should comfort and sustain ourselves when time seems long and the spread of religion seems slow. The man who casts in his lot with the people of God, and spends time, energy, money, prayers, for the growth of the heavenly kingdom, is engaged in a sure enterprise. The law of success in it is more inevitable than that which brings the sun to chase the night away. Seed-time and harvest are fickleness itself compared to the sureness of return from work done for God.

4. All enmity shall be overthrown at last. Men's work may antagonize God's work, it is true, but their endeavor can only react upon them to their own destruction. The mightiest foe goes under, while the kingdom goes on. "A medal was struck by Diocletian, which still remains, bearing the inscription, 'The name of Christians being extinguished.' And in Spain two monumental pillars were raised on which were written: I. 'Diocletian . . . for having extinguished the name of Christians.' II. 'Diocletian . . . for having everywhere abolished the superstition of Christ.' We have here a monument raised by paganism over the grave of its vanquished foe. But in this the people imagined a vain thing; so far from being deceased, Christianity was on the eve of its final and permanent triumph" (Spurgeon).

*Personal lessons.*

I. Christ's cause and God's cause are one, and if we would obey God we must yield to his Anointed. "For

the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him" (John 5: 22, 23). There is no such thing as separating the service of God from the service of Christ.

1. The rejection of Christ is antagonism to God. God says: "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." Jesus says: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me." "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." "Let this, therefore, be held as a settled point, that all who do not submit themselves to the authority of Christ make war against God" (Calvin).

3. The absurdity of sin. Antagonism against the purposes of God cannot succeed. To do wrong in view of all God has revealed about it is, intellectually, folly of the most abject sort, and yet—these foolish wills of ours!

4. The blessedness of accepting Christ. This brings us under the benign rule of him who is the destined heir of all the ages, God's chosen, God's only-begotten Son. Thus we satisfy the conditions of the highest personal blessing, we take our share in the accomplishment of God's purposes, and we receive eternal life. May the King subdue us to himself, and not us only but the whole world. In us and in all things may his name be glorified. Amen.



## THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

LUKE 2. 1-16.

IN the early morning a group of gossiping orientals stood about the doorway of the village khan. It was in Bethlehem, the ancient city of David, which was at this time crowded with strangers come thither in pursuance of an edict of Quirinius requiring all of the Davidic line to enroll themselves there. The khan was a low, large building with an open court and fountain in the center. No provision was made for guests other than to shelter them and their beasts of burden. As for food, it was expected that each would bring his own rude fare of dates and parched corn. It was a motley company now gathered in the court and about the door: Arab traders, gray-bearded sheiks, camel-drivers, women with their hoods drawn over their faces, children tugging at their mothers' skirts. Deep interest was depicted on their faces while they conversed in low tones. Now and then a glance was directed or a finger pointed toward the stable connected with the inn. The previous evening two travellers, a carpenter and his betrothed wife, had arrived from the north and desired entertainment; but the khan was already full and they were obliged to put up with such shelter as the stable could afford. In such humble surroundings, during the early twilight, the great mystery of life had begun. The feeble cry of a new-born infant broke the stillness of the morning.

At that moment the sound of footsteps betokened the arrival of other guests. A company of shepherds drew

near, clad in red tunics, with white turbans, and poniards at their girdles. The company gathered about them and listened with wonder to their strange tale: "We were abiding in the fields on yonder mountain-slope, last night, keeping watch over our flocks, when suddenly the angel of the Lord came down and glory shone around us. At the first we were sore afraid: but the angel said, 'Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord! And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find him wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a manger.' And then a multitude of angels came about us and sang, 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men!' After which they vanished; and we said one to another, 'Let us go unto Bethlehem and see this great thing.' Have ye seen aught of the wonderful child?" Then the company told them of the birth in the stable. Thither the shepherds at once betook themselves: On entering the low-browed cave which was used as a stable, so soon as their eyes were accustomed to the darkness this was what they saw: in one of the rude stalls a mother, pale and feeble, reclining on the straw, and near by an Infant lying in a manger. The sign was true! They had found the long looked-for, long prayed-for Christ.

Madonna and Child! This is the picture that for centuries has engaged the attention of poets and artists, of irreverent dreamers and devout theologians. You may find it rudely carven at wayside shrines, depicted on canvas in the great galleries and set forth in golden glory over the high altars of cathedrals. We all stand wondering before it like the rustics who peered in through the stable door. Here is something that we cannot fathom.

The mystery of birth is happening all the while about us; but around this wondrous birth of Jesus all history revolves. At this manger a new era begins. The chronicles will henceforth be dated *Anno Domini*. The world can never be the same again. The hand of this Infant is destined to shake the false gods from their pedestals. As he walks through the years kingdoms and principalities will totter and fall, until all the glory of the earth shall center in the kingdom of God.

A large portion of the Christian Church, the world over, renders a peculiar homage to the virgin mother of Jesus. To many of us it seems but little short of idolatry to give her any part whatsoever of the devotion which belongs to her divine Child. It may be, however, that in our revolt from Mariolatry we have withheld from her the honor which is her just due. As we stand here with the shepherds at the doorway of the stable, beholding both mother and Child, let us consider their relative claims upon us.

1. *The Madonna*. It had been predicted, over and over again, from the time of the protevangel, that the Messiah should be born of a woman. As by the weakness of one woman sin had entered into the world, so to another was granted the distinguished honor of bringing forth out of her travail the hope of eternal life. This was not by reason of any peculiar merit of her own. She was not divine, not even akin with angels. We have no reason to suppose that she was even gifted with unusual personal charms. Monks in reverie and poets in rhapsody have vied with each other in extolling her beauty. One of them describes her as "leaning out among the jessamines in the window of her home and watching the white clouds floating in the azure sky; young and beautiful, not

only with the voluptuous attractions of Oriental grace, but with those superior charms which come from riches of the soul, of thought and fancy and emotion, which lavish themselves in a perfect symmetry of mental and physical development; beautiful after the manner of the Hebrew daughters, in raven locks and lustrous eyes and the deep glowing complexion of the East, and beautiful besides with that radiance which is enkindled by the indwelling of a peace that the world knoweth not of." All this is unsubstantial as the stuff that dreams are made of. Let it suffice that she had common part with us in human nature, for in this lies the clew of the Incarnation. When the fulness of time was come God sent forth his Son made of a woman. He took not on him the nature of angels, but of men. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

"God rest ye all, good Christians!  
Upon this blessed morn  
The Lord of all good Christians  
Was of a woman born."

Let it be observed, furthermore, that Mary was a *sinful* woman; she was "one among women," and not above them; being in all points such as we are, not merely in the constitution of her being, but in its defilement also. She had both inherited sin and committed it. The so-called Immaculate Conception of the virgin has not the slightest warrant in reason or holy writ. It reads thus: "That the most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first moment of her conception, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Christ, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin." Not so have we understood her own words, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God *my Saviour*." That was a sinner's cry.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning represents the virgin mother as thus addressing her unconscious Child :

“Sleep, sleep, my Holy One!  
My flesh, my Lord! What name? I do not know  
A name that seemeth not too high or low :  
Too far from me or heaven.  
My JESUS! *that* is best! that word being given  
By the majestic angel whose command  
Was softly as a man’s beseeching said,  
When I and all the earth appeared to stand  
In the great overflow  
Of light celestial from his wings and head.  
Sleep! sleep! MY SAVING ONE!”

The doctrine of the sinlessness of Mary was invented by the schoolmen in the Middle Ages. After a debate of six hundred years, in which popes, cardinals, holy fathers and philosophers took part, it was at last made an article of faith by a formal decree of Pius IX. on the 8th of December, 1854. This tenet is the corner-stone of Mariolatry. Its germ can be traced as far back as the fourth century; at that time a new word was coined, *Theotokos*, meaning “mother of God.” It was not intended to assert that Mary was in any sense mother of the Uncreated Essence, but the word was liable to this interpretation. The right of Mary to the title *Theotokos* was denied by Nestorius, who was thereupon condemned for heresy in the Council of Ephesus, A. D. 431. His condemners marched through the city with torches and swinging censers. From that moment we may regard Mariolatry as fairly under way. The troubadours celebrated the praises of Mary in sacred song, and painters represented her as crowned with a diadem of stars. The church began to sing :

"Hail, virginal mother! Hail, temple divine!  
The glory of angels and purity's shrine!  
Thee from eternity  
God did ordain  
Over his household  
As mistress to reign!"

This was at the beginning of the Dark Ages. As the inner life of religion was quenched its outer forms were multiplied. The walls of churches were covered with pictures of the Madonna. Five hundred years have dimmed but not obliterated the colors of those splendid masterpieces. On panel and ceiling and vaulted chancel the virgin and her Child are still pointed out. The Christ-child is thrown into the background; the mother is made conspicuous and surpassingly beautiful. So by progressive steps she came to be looked on as a co-redeemer with Christ. Then from Rome was sent forth an invitation, not yet called a mandate, that all should kiss the hand before the "Queen of Heaven." This was in the black night before the Reformation. It was in 1517 that Luther nailed his theses to the door of the town-hall at Wittenberg and made his protest against the worship of any but the living God. All hail the protest!

For a while Mary-worship was repressed, but only to revive again in recent years as a formal dogma or pronunciamento of the Catholic Church. At this hour there are multitudes all over the world bowing at the shrine of this woman of Nazareth and crying, "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us!" If she herself could appear in the midst of these devotees, of a certainty she would cry out, as the angel did in the vision of St. John, "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant. Worship God!"

"Say of me as the Heavenly said, 'Thou art  
The blesseddest of women"—blessedest,  
Not holiest nor noblest—no high name  
Whose height misplaced may pierce me like a shame  
When I sit meek in heaven."

But while the virgin mother is stripped of these false honors, which she herself would be the first to repudiate, she still challenges our highest admiration. Why should we hesitate to speak of her as "blessed Mary," or "the blessed virgin," when the angel thus addressed her? It is no slight honor that her name should be found in the most venerable of our creeds and mingled with the soul's confession of a Saviour: "I believe in Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary." If we decline to worship we do not therefore disesteem her. The most beautiful traits of womanhood are associated with her character. We revere her as a most estimable ideal of feminine purity and devotion. When Gabriel told her that she was to be overshadowed by the Holy Ghost and bring forth a Son, she knew that her fair name was in danger, that the world would point its finger at her. She foresaw that she must wear the scarlet letter on her breast. But she bowed her head without a murmur, saying, "Behold the servant of the Lord." There was heroism! It would doubtless have been easier to die; yet her faithful heart asked no question, interposed no argument, but "set itself at once to quiet expectation." Bishop Hall says: "There is no more noble proof of faith than thus to captivate all our powers unto God and, without scissitation, go blindfold whither he will." It was enough for her that God required it: "Be it unto me according to thy word!"

When all is said, however, in just praise of the virgin

mother, it still remains that she was human and her Child divine. A gulf lies between these two as wide as that between the finite and the infinite. Her we revere for her pure womanhood, but him we worship as very God of very God.

2. *The Christ-child.* It is not easy to think of Mary's nursling as the great *I am*. How could God—that "circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere"—be held in a mother's arms or laid in a manger? Our reason is dazzled by the thought: faith only can receive it. "Great is the mystery of godliness: God manifest in flesh; the angels desire to look into it."

This sleeping Child is the preexistent Word by whom were called into being the things that were not. He who shares this stable with the lowing herd is the same that sat upon the great white throne, worshipped by angels and archangels as with the voice of many waters and of mighty thunderings. All the previous ages of the world's history were but a preparation for his birth and all its subsequent ages were but to serve for the diffusion of his spirit in the lives of men. This is he of whom it was written, "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel, God with us." And again, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of peace." On Mary's bosom sleeps "the Desire of all nations." With a murmured lullaby she soothes the slumber of her divine offspring!

The relation which this wonderful Child was to sustain towards our race was indicated by the angels in the



words, "A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." This was further emphasized in the name Jesus; "and they shall call his name Jesus, because he shall save his people from their sins." The race groaneth and travaileth in the bondage of sin. Deep down in every heart there is a longing, "What shall I do to be saved? What shall I do that I might inherit eternal life?" To answer this longing the only-begotten Son of God humbled himself to be born of a woman, that so he might be able to take our place before the offended law and bear the penalty of our sin. His birth means salvation. The old priest Simeon held the divine Child in his arms and cried, with the joy of a long-deferred hope fulfilled at last, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!" Nor is there salvation in any other. His life is the golden ladder of Jacob's dream, resting on the earth and losing itself in heaven, a mystic highway of mediatorial grace; as Jesus himself said, "What and if ye shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man?" The works which he wrought were manifestations of divine love and mercy towards the children of men. The sermons which he preached had reference to the great problems which reach out into eternity and concern us most vitally as immortal beings made in the image of God. His death was an answer to the query, "How shall God be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly?" And faith in the atoning power of his death is an answer to the eager cry, "How shall a man be just before his God?" His resurrection is our deliverance from death; and his intercession at the right hand of the majesty on high is our assurance of an abundant entrance into life.

Thus the Child in the manger is everything to us.

The humble conditions of his birth give no token of the mighty place which he is to fill in the destiny of men and nations. On March 20, 1811, all France was gladdened by the birth of a son to the great Napoleon. Bells rang, processions marched with waving banners, great guns boomed forth the imperial joy. But what a pall of sorrow would have fallen upon the nation had it been foreseen that the prince was to linger but a few short and sorrowful years and then sink into a soon-to-be-forgotten grave! The Child of Bethlehem was greeted only by the angels' song; the world that was dying for his kindly offices had no welcome for him. But every passing year has brightened his glory. To-day millions on millions bow reverently before him. The unbelieving world has joined the rustic group who look in at the stable door inquiring, "Who is he?" It is beginning to be seen that he hath even upon his swaddling bands a name written, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

Sleep on, O Christ-child, in thy humble cradle, and rest thee for thy life of toil and sorrow and triumph on the cross. We bow, with the shepherds, before thee, and render adoration for thy glorious purpose of redemption. Thine is the great heart that shall yet break by reason of sympathy for the world's sin. Thine is the mighty arm that shall break every chain and bid the oppressed go free. Welcome to earth, O Prince of glory! Welcome to our hearts, O Prince of peace!

## THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE.

LUKE 2. 25-38.

THE famous Hillel, revered by the Jews as head-master of one of their great schools of philosophy, had a son Simeon who was chosen president of the Sanhedrin, A. D. 13. It is a curious fact that this Simeon is passed by in the Mishna, which records the wise words and doings of other rabbis in wearisome detail. Why this silence? Was it, perhaps, because the man had brought himself into contempt by espousing the cause of the Nazarene Carpenter? We have no means of knowing whether or no he was this same Simeon who served in the temple and "waited for the consolation of Israel;" the date of his service as well as the contemptuous oversight of the Mishna would seem to favor it. In any case, he probably belonged to the same class of patient watchers who detected in current events many signs and tokens of the near approach of that Messiah,

"Whom kings and prophets longed to see  
And died without the sight."

At this time there were many such eager, hopeful ones. They had read the prophecies of Holy Writ respecting the coming of One who should bruise the serpent's head, restore the glory to Israel, and deliver the groaning world from shame and bondage. The time was propitious. For a period of four hundred years there had been no open vision; the lights had gone out in the sanctuary and the oracles were dumb. Since the darkest hour is just before

the dawn it seemed as if the morning must be nigh. There was a universal feeling of expectancy. Something must happen. Things could not go on much longer as they were. The magi of the East were watching the stars; the faithful in Israel were looking forth from the windows and saying, "How long will the wheels of his chariot tarry?"

This Simeon was one of the faithful. A few things are said which give us a clear insight into his character. *First*, "he was just and devout;" that is, he revered God and lived uprightly. That statement takes in the sum total of duty; it describes the attitude of Simeon toward God and his fellow men. *Second*, he "waited for the consolation of Israel." By "the consolation of Israel" is meant Messiah. The children of Israel were in sore need of consolation. Their glory had departed. The sceptre had been surrendered to Rome. The national religion had degenerated into an empty ritual. Pride of Abrahamic birth had taken the place of humble joy in filial devotion to God. A common formula of prayer among the faithful was, "May I live to see the consolation of Israel!" *Third*, "the Holy Ghost was upon him." This means that he was in close and constant communion with God. It is further explained in the statement that a special revelation had been given him respecting the coming of Messiah: "It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." The just and devout in all ages have an insight into the divine plans and purposes which is not accorded to others. Such as do the Lord's will are enabled to know the doctrine. He takes into his confidence those who love him.

Anna the prophetess was also one of the waiting

ones. We have here a brief monograph of her character. *First*, she was of the tribe of Asher, a member of one of the lingering families of the secession. *Second*, she was "of great age," above fourscore years. Her eyes were dim toward earth but clear toward heavenly things. *Third*, she was a widow. A glimpse of her sorrow and loneliness is given in the statement that she had lived with her husband only seven years. How long a period of waiting had been hers. To her "the consolation of Israel" meant everything. It meant not merely the restoration of Israel's glory but the fulfilment of her hope of the blessed reunion in heaven; for this is involved in the truth of Messianic prophecy and gospel story. *Fourth*, she was in constant attendance upon the temple: "She departed not from it; but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Perhaps, as in the case of Huldah, a chamber was assigned to her within the sacred enclosure; and she may have busied herself devoutly in the trimming of the lamps or other ministry. *Fifth*, she was the first to declare Christ in the Holy City. "She gave thanks to the Lord, and spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." In this she was the forerunner of a noble company of saintly women who have sounded forth his praises. "God gave the word: great was the multitude of the women who published it" (Psalm 68: 11).

Now as to the strange thing that happened in the temple at this time. Simeon was there. "He came by the Spirit into the temple;" that is, he had received a divine intimation that he would better be there.\* And while he was worshipping, two peasants entered bringing with

\* The church bell is the voice of the Spirit to believers in our time. We grieve Him when we do not heed it.

them a child, "to do for him after the custom of the law." It was Joseph and Mary and the infant Christ. He was their first-born. It was the custom in Israel, forty days after circumcision, to dedicate the first-born to the Lord. The time had come. It is written that "Christ was made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." It was on this account that, forty days before, he had been subjected to the rite of circumcision. Now, as Mary's first-born, he must be separated. It was customary to offer in connection with this ceremony a lamb and a pigeon, the former for a sin-offering, the latter for a burnt-offering ; one expressing a sense of sin, the other a spirit of consecration. Joseph and Mary, being sinful as others, felt the need of both. It is, however, a striking and pathetic commentary on their low estate that, taking advantage of the special provision made for persons of moderate means, they brought, instead of a lamb and a pigeon, two pigeons. He who was rich did, indeed, for our sakes become poor, that we through his poverty might inherit the riches of eternal life.

On seeing these humble worshippers enter the temple the heart of Simeon beat fast. His eyes were fixed upon the holy Child. A voice within him whispered, "This is he, the Lord's Christ!" A great joy filled his breast and suffused his sight. The consummation of his hopes had come ; the vision for which he had prayed and waited in patient expectation. What more was there to live for ? Earth with its pains and sorrows and disappointments lost its hold upon him : heaven like a bright morning seemed to dawn. "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!" was the most natural expression of his joy."

This *nunc dimittis* is a familiar hymn in the liturgies

of the Church. It is brief, but full of testimony to the character and work of Jesus. Observe, *first*, it sets forth Christ as the Saviour: "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation." In the face of this holy Child Simeon beheld the finished work—a world delivered from its shame and sorrow. *Second*, he is "a light to lighten the nations." The heart of Simeon had been so broadened in his study of Messianic promise that he was able to perceive the universal scope of the gospel. It was not intended merely to restore the glory to Israel, though that was included; but the world was to be illumined by it. In Jesus those who were afar off were to be brought nigh: the waste places were to be made glad through him, and the wilderness was to rejoice and blossom as the rose. As the sun shines for all—visiting the round earth in its diurnal course, melting the snows upon the mountains and ripening the harvests in the meadows, gladdening the verdant oak and the modest violet at its foot—so Christ is the light of the world, lightening every man that cometh into the world, and bringing the possibility of life to Jew and Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free. *Third*, he is the touchstone of character: "he is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." All who would be children of the light hear his voice; the children of darkness turn from him as shadows flee before the rising sun. To receive him is to live; to reject him is worse than never to have heard of him at all. His name is a savor of life unto life or else of death unto death. The same may be said of all truth and goodness: the sight of it helps or hardens us; but of Christ, the incarnation of truth and goodness, this is preëminently true; we cannot touch him, see him, hear of him, without being either the better

or worse for it. *Fourth*, he is "a sign spoken against." He is the living sign of Heaven's good-will to men; yet what dreadful things are said of him! On one of the stones taken from the basement of Cæsar's palace in Rome is a rude picture of an ass stretched on a cross, and under it this inscription:

"ALEXAMENOS THEON PHOBEL."

It is not difficult to fill out the story. In Cæsar's kitchen, perhaps, there was a humble follower of Christ. He bore patiently the revilings of his fellow-servants. One of them with a nail scratched this caricature of the Crucifixion upon the wall and its accompanying taunt, "Alexamenos worships this as his God!" Thus Christ has ever been spoken against. His cross is foolishness to the Greek who seeks after wisdom, and a stumbling-block to the Jew clamoring for a sign. *Fifth*, the love of Mary for this Christ-child was to pierce through her like a sword. She, whose soul had gone out to her Son with more than a common mother's love by reason of the secret which she shared with him, was to be known throughout the centuries as *mater dolorosa*. It would not be possible to imagine the depth of her sorrow when she stood beside the cross whereon her first-born hung in shame and agony. Other mothers have known pain, but was ever mother's pain like hers? Yet there is a sense in which the death-anguish of Jesus drives the sword through every Christian heart. If we love him we suffer with him. And the more we love him the more really and deeply do we enter with him into the fellowship of his death.

While Simeon was singing this *nunc dimittis*, "at that instant" entered the prophetess Anna. She, too, had been waiting for the consolation of Israel, and she,



beholding the Christ, "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord." It was a melting, rapturous scene. Let us picture it: Joseph and Mary standing as silent, rapt worshippers in the holy place; Simeon with the Child in his arms, his eyes uplifted, and pouring out his soul before the Lord; the aged Anna adding her *gaudeamus* with trembling voice. Blessed watchers for the dawn! The dayspring from on high had at length risen upon them.

All over the world there are souls waiting for the consolation of Israel. They feel their spiritual need and the inadequacy of earthly things to satisfy it. Their hearts cry out after God, even the living God. They grope after him as blind men feeling their way along the wall. And God is not far from any one of them. He has revealed himself in the person of the Christ and he is ever going forth in quest of those who desire him. "A seeking sinner finds a seeking Saviour." No heart ever really wanted Christ without having him. The supreme moment of life is when we first look upon the face of our Beloved and cry, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation!"

And when we have found him we are ever eager to know more of him. Salvation is but the first step in the long journey of sanctification which leads to God. And our progress in sanctification is measured by the intimacy of our relation with Christ as guide and travelling companion. If we will, he is nearer than our nearest friend, nearer than touching or seeing. The vision of spiritual beauty that came to Simeon and Anna when they looked upon the face of the Christ-child was with them until they saw him robed in light and glory unapproachable. An ever present sense of a living Saviour is the assurance of an abundant entrance into the city of God.

And there are those, too, who watch for the harvest.

In the name of the Master they toil and pray for the salvation of souls ; and hope deferred maketh them heart-sick. Yet let them watch and wait and believe. God honors patient waiting. Simeon and Anna kept vigil till they were old and gray, but the vision came at last. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless—*doubtless*—come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

And are we not all waiting for the appearing of our Lord? Do we not watch the heavens to see them rend asunder and the angel host come trooping forth with Jesus at their head? If he tarry, let us still with patience wait and watch. For his promise is yea and amen. Maranatha! the Lord cometh. One of these bright days, as we go about our common tasks, the blast of a trumpet, clear and loud, will rend the air: and gazing upward we shall see the King in his glory and the white-winged multitude following after. Then with joy like that of the watchers in the temple we shall look into each others' faces saying, "He is come at last! The consolation of Israel is at hand!" Meanwhile let us be faithful in our places; faithful in the heat and burden of the day. And when increasing years shall bid us tarry at home while the reapers pass by to the harvest, still, like Simeon and Anna, let us be praying and waiting for the consolation of Israel.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

## THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN.

MATT. 2:1-12.

THE stars are our oldest friends. We watched them in our childhood, tracing the outlines of grotesque constellations and reaching out with vain questionings towards the sparkling wonder-land. The same orbs are in the heavens now; the planets still march faithfully up and down the ramparts, the never-closing eyes of the fixed stars still gaze coldly from the far distance upon us. Not one of them faileth. It is not strange that some have fancied it possible to trace the destiny of men and nations in the intermingling yet ever orderly paths of the great lights. Thus the magi watched the heavens for signs and tokens of the advent of Christ. The hope of his coming was as old as the sorrow of sin. At this time there was reason to believe, in passing events set over against prophecy, that he might appear at any moment. These astrologers of the East shared in the universal expectancy. It was natural that, when they saw the portent in the heavens, they should "rejoice with exceeding joy."

*Was it a comet?* Milton speaks of it as a comet "dangling in the air." It is inferred from certain Chinese astronomical tables that in the Year of Rome 750 a comet in fact appeared and was visible for a period of seventy days. If this was indeed the Star of Bethlehem, it is fair to say that no other comet ever left so glorious a trail of light behind it.

*Or was it a conjunction of planets?* On October 10, 1604, Kepler observed a peculiar conjunction of Jupiter, Mars and Saturn. By careful calculation he determined that a similar event had taken place on May 7, B. C. 7; whereupon Ideler exclaims: "The star of astrology has become the torch of chronology," and proceeds to displace the Star of Bethlehem from the category of the supernatural. It should be added that this phenomenon occurred in the constellation of Pisces, which was associated in ancient astrology with the destinies of Judea. It must be observed, however, that the date assigned to this conjunction is three years before the birth of Jesus. Moreover it must have appeared as a brilliant ball of light, at an altitude of fifty-seven degrees, while the Star of Bethlehem was vertical, "standing over the place where the young child was."

*Or was it a meteor?* Was it a shining messenger sent upon this particular errand and then extinguished for ever; as the drinking-cups of kings, once used, were broken as too sacred to be touched by common lips? Why not? The whole earthly life of Jesus, as the most stupendous of historical events, was environed with prodigies. There was, indeed, almost an antecedent probability that the starry heavens would be put under contribution to herald his birth and light the pathway of those who sought him.

In any case, it would appear to have been a supernatural portent; as much out of the ordinary—that is, as miraculous—as the cloudy pillar, the dove that descended upon Jesus at his baptism, the light that shone upon his face in the Transfiguration, or the noon-day darkness that gathered about his cross.

Now as to its moral significance.

1. *It was a royal harbinger.* The ancient astrologers believed that new stars had to do peculiarly with the destinies of kings. More than a thousand years before this time a trance had fallen on Balaam, as he gazed from the summit of Peor upon the tents of Israel whitening the plain below ; and under its influence he, urged to curse, was forced to pronounce a Messianic blessing : " I shall see him, but not now ; I shall behold him, but not nigh ; there shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre out of Israel, and the corners of Moab shall be smitten !" On that prophecy had been kindled an inextinguishable hope of Messiah's glorious reign. The shining of this star in the East was the expected token of his advent. It glowed like a diamond on the index-finger of the night, pointing to the birthplace of the King. It " went before " these magi—over the mountains of Chaldea, over the valley of Euphrates, around by Damascus and the green slopes of Lebanon ; southward along the vale of Jordan, westward by the ascent to Jerusalem, down again toward Bethlehem—and there stood still. It bowed low and stood still over a stable ! " Surely there must be some mistake," the magi were saying, when suddenly an infant's wail fell upon their ears. They had found the King.

2. *The star which went before these wise men was the bright and morning star.* It betokened the coming of One whose light lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The incidental blessings of the incarnation fall not upon Christians alone but upon all the children of men. It is like the shining of the sun, which even the blind must be grateful for.

A new day broke upon the earth when Jesus was born.

*First, Politically.* At that time government was tyr-

anny: kings flourished on the poverty and sorrow of their people. The publican sat at every gate exacting taxes for the royal establishment. A few fortunate ones basked in the king's favor; but the masses were as little thought of as sheep and oxen. In the whole Roman empire there were less than two thousand proprietors and more than sixty millions of slaves. These slaves were herded together like cattle in stalls. Where was "the thrifty middle class"? There was none. Labor was disreputable. The plebeians lived in indolence, crying perpetually for "bread and games;" and to keep them in submission bread and games were provided at the public expense. Beggars swarmed along the streets and thoroughfares. As for women—well might they veil their faces. They were treated as either toys or drudges. Plato's definition of disorder is "when slaves and wives are disobedient." Divorces were frequent. Seneca says, "Many women counted their years by the number of their husbands." Juvenal says, "Many are divorced before their nuptial garlands are faded." Children were little thought of. Unwelcome infants were exposed to death in out of the way places. All this was in Rome; the proudest and most highly civilized of nations. Verily the time had come for a new order of things. The advent of Christ meant the exaltation of man as man. It meant the enfranchisement of the people. It meant liberty, equality, fraternity.

*Second*, Commercially. The lines of commerce are bonds that hold together the corners of the earth and realize the solidarity of the race. At the time of the advent of Jesus there was little of the sort. Processions of camels winding over the mountains, a few cockle-shells cruising near shore between neighboring ports, these were

all. But what trains and fleets have come after the wise men who followed the star! And with them have come new laws and customs of intercommunication. "Every one for himself" was the formula of the ante-Christian world. To this day there is an utter lack of mutual confidence among peoples that lie outside the charmed circle of the Gospel. "The unspeakable Turk" and "the lying Arab" await the light. In Christian communities we trust one another. There is no more eloquent tribute to the illuminating power of the Christian religion than our banking system. Men used to bury their money in the ground because it was safe nowhere else. But under the influence of Gospel light there has come to be confidence between man and man.

*Third*, Industrially. The laborer is no longer a slave. Handicraft is no longer dishonorable. Nero executed at one time four thousand plebeians to vindicate the murder of a knight. To-day the queen of Great Britain can not strike a scullery-maid with impunity. The daystar of Christianity is shining with a most helpful light in all earth's work-shops. Jesus the Carpenter has vindicated the toiler's manhood. The shame of calloused hands has passed by. The humblest may earn his own food, dwell in his own cottage, strike hands with his fellow-craftsmen in a labor guild, and demand his rights in open court.

"What though on homely fare we dine,  
Wear hoddin grey an' a that;  
Gie fools their silks and knaves their wine,  
A man 's a man for a' that!  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's coming yet for a' that,  
When man to man the whole world o'er  
Shall brothers be an' a' that!"

*Fourth, Socially.* The centre of our modern social life is the Christian home. The father there exercises a just authority; the mother rules in love; and sons and daughters, yielding to them a sweet filial reverence, are bound together in warm, prayerful affection. The archetype and original of this delightful picture is the home at Nazareth, where the boy Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and was in subjection unto his parents. The home as here portrayed is peculiar to such nations as have felt the illuminating influence of the gospels. And out of this institution, the Christian home, flow streams of influence which are destined ultimately to fertilize and gladden the whole earth. There is a German legend which says that once a year, when the full moon casts its radiance like a silver bridge across the Rhine, the spirit of Charlemagne comes forth and, standing midway on the bridge, lifts its hands and pronounces a blessing on the homes and fields and rivers of the fatherland. For Charlemagne read Christ, for Germany the world, for "once a year" unceasingly, and the legend is true.

3. *This star of Bethlehem was also the star of empire.* It was the foregleam of the golden age. The Persians are right in saying that a mortal conflict is going on between the powers of light and darkness; but in their Zoroastrian faith they find no prophecy of the outcome. We know that the light must triumph. Jesus, the bright and morning star, shall reign in effulgent goodness from the river unto the ends of the earth. The "Star out of Jacob" is destined to "smite the corners of Moab."

"For, lo! the days are hastening on  
By prophet bards foretold,  
When with the ever-circling years  
Comes round the age of gold;



When peace shall over all the earth  
Its ancient splendors fling,  
And the whole world send back the song  
Which now the angels sing."

There has never been hopeless darkness since Jesus was born. Every day the world catches a little more of the heavenly light. A medal was struck off by the Emperor Diocletian bearing the figure of a strangled hydra and over it the word "Deleta Christianitas." Christianity strangled! As well try to strangle the sun, the fountain, the breath of the morning. Marvellously has God glorified the name of his well-beloved Son during these nineteen hundred years. The royal ensigns onward go. The star that "flamed on the forehead of the sky" when Jesus was born shall glow with ever increasing brightness until the whole world is illumed by it.

4. *This was a guiding star*, and therein it became to these wise men a star of destiny. Had they refused to follow it they would, in all likelihood, never have found the Christ. Excuses were at hand, had they desired them. The journey was long—ten times as long as a journey across our continent to-day. But these men were in earnest; they wanted to find Jesus, and when the star, like an angel, beckoned and led the way they followed until they found him.

"Every man," said Napoleon, "has his star." It is true that influences are brought to bear upon every man which, if he yield, will lead him to the realization of all his grandest hopes. "There are so many voices, and none of them is without signification." God is ever guiding us to Bethlehem, to the noblest and best. When we wander he calls us back. What we name impulses are, doubtless, oftentimes but the drawings of his Spirit. A

mother's voice, a strain of music, the memory of a face returning through the mist of years, may be our star of destiny.

The Russian priests tell of a woman who greeted the wise men on their way to Bethlehem. And they said to her, "Come thou with us; we have seen Christ's star and go to worship him." But she would not. "My house must be set in order," she said. "I have garments to make and food to prepare for the good-man's coming." Afterwards, when she knew her mistake, the magi had passed on and the star shone no more. And now, old and gray, the Baboushka wanders about gazing into all the children's faces in vain search for the Christ-child. Oh, let us follow the star while it shines above us! Let us yield to all gracious influences that call us to Bethlehem. The wise men are on their way.

## THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

MATT. 2:13-23.

GOD reigns. However his plans may seem to be thwarted he has his way in the long run. As a farmer walking through his field on a dewy morning makes havoc with the cobwebs strung across his path, so does the Omnipotent stride through the schemes of the adversary. In vain do kings of the earth set themselves and rulers take counsel against him. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." He bringeth all their purposes to naught. He maketh the wrath of men to praise him and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain. To run upon the bosses of his shield is the height of fatuity. The king's heart is in his hand as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

All this should have occurred to Herod before he planned the slaughter of the innocents. He was alarmed when the wise men spoke of one "born King of the Jews." Like many another oriental ruler he thought to avert the danger by extirpating the seed royal. But he reckoned without God. It is a foolish and dangerous thing to wrestle with Omnipotence; not less preposterous than for a beetle to set itself before the wheels of the king's chariot. The breath of such men as Herod is in their nostrils: they die, but God rides on.

It was known to the Lord from the beginning what Herod would do, and provision had been made against it. A dream was used as the instrument of his confusion.

God can use anything—a budded rod, the jawbone of an ass, furnace fire, a brooding dove, spittle, the rustling of leaves—anything can be made to answer his purpose for the defence of his friends or the confounding of his foes. He has over and over again revealed himself in dreams and visions of the night, but far more frequently in ancient times than since the giving of the Scriptures. It is now the part of superstition to trust to dreams; wise people turn to the Law and the Testimony. It is related of Rowland Hill that, on hearing a young candidate for the ministry lay stress upon a dream, he said, “Dreams are well enough in their way, but we would much rather know how you go on when wide awake.”

In Joseph’s dream an angel spoke to him. It is worth noting that Joseph, and not Mary, was the recipient of this angel’s visit. We must not be unmindful of the part taken by this modest and retiring man in the gospel story. As Mary’s husband he was partaker of the obloquy which fell upon her by reason of the strange birth of Jesus. His faithful acquiescence in the divine plan is here rewarded. He receives a special commission from the Lord: “Arise, and take the young Child and his mother and flee into Egypt.” It speaks well for him that there was no delay: at once “he arose and took the young Child and his mother by night and departed.” His faith in God made him a usable man. God has little use for the man who answers with an if or a but. The true servant waits upon his master’s nod and beck, ever answering, “I delight to do thy will.”

1. *The Flight into Egypt.* Why into Egypt? *First*, because it was near by. *Second*, because the way was familiar. There was a constant stream of commerce between the two countries. They were bound together

by a trodden path. *Third*, they were sure of a welcome there. The semi-barbarous tribes to the east of Jordan might not have been willing to receive them; but the Egyptians were a hospitable people. And, besides, there were multitudes of Jews dwelling among them. *Fourth*, Egypt, though a Roman province, was outside the jurisdiction of Herod. He could not reach the fugitives there. *Fifth*, Egypt was the place indicated by the angel. This was sufficient reason of itself. God was managing this affair and Joseph was quite willing to have it so.

A further reason, of which Joseph could scarcely have been cognizant, is given in the words, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son." We find the prophecy here referred to in Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a child then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt." In the application of the prediction to the matter in hand we are led to certain conclusions: *First*, In New Testament references to the Old Testament's prophecy less attention is paid to quotation word for word than to the real and accurate meaning of the text. This is always the important thing. In our own use of Scripture we should make more of the spirit than of the letter. *Second*, In many of the Old Testament prophecies there was a double meaning. The obvious and immediate reference in Hosea's was to the going forth of the children of Israel from Egypt by night; but God knew their hidden sense. He designed that, while they should touch the earlier event, they should also in due time be fulfilled in the story of the infant Christ. The secondary application was no more accidental than the primary, but was fully intended of God. *Third*, We must not be led,

by such divinely authorized adaptations, to be ever on the lookout for hidden meanings or to take fanciful and unwarranted liberties with the plain meaning of Holy Writ. Our part is to take God precisely at his word; when he interprets it is safe to follow him.

The flight into Egypt finds a curious parallel in the vision of the woman and her child in the twelfth chapter of Revelation. This woman "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars," is represented as fleeing with her divine child "into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God." A great dragon "having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads" pursues her, determined "to devour her child." An angel host comes forth to their defence. There is "war in heaven;" the great dragon is cast down, while voices are heard, "Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ!" Then the dragon, being defeated in his purpose to devour the child, goeth forth "to make war with the remnant of her seed, even such as keep God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Here is a remarkable outline of the persecutions of the church. For centuries she fled before the violence of kings. But the hosts of heaven were her defence and "the earth helped the woman." Again and again—as with the refugees of the Catacombs, the dwellers among the mountains of Asia, the Waldenses, the Huguenots, the Beggars of Holland, the Scotch Covenanters—"the wings of a great eagle were given unto her that she might fly into the wilderness, where she should be nourished for a time." Wonderful have been her deliverances. As Israel of old was brought out of bondage with a mighty arm, as the Christ-child himself

found shelter under the shadow of the Egyptian throne, so has God put his great arms about his church and kept her safe amidst her foes. And the thing that hath been shall be. God is the defence of his people. The gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

“ Hammer away, ye rebel bands;  
Your hammers break, God’s anvil stands.”

2. *The Slaughter of the Innocents.* “ Then Herod was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in the coasts thereof from two years old and under.” The record is brief but dark as midnight. Every word is freighted with an infant’s helpless wail and a mother’s unavailing sorrow. If it seem strange that God in his providence should allow such things, let us be sure that in the final outcome even this monstrous murder will be seen to have been overruled for good.

There are cavillers who question the accuracy of this narrative on the general ground that such cruelty is incredible: but consider, *First*, that crimes of this character were not uncommon among the oriental rulers of those days. *Second*, Herod was just the sort of man to do this thing. He was a monster of iniquity. His hands were red with the blood of many, including his own sons. *Third*, the number of victims in this matter was probably not so great as is generally supposed. Allowing the population of Bethlehem to have been two thousand the children “ of two years and under ” could scarcely have exceeded one hundred. To a man like Herod the slaughter of a hundred children, in a matter endangering the succession to his throne, would have seemed a paltry thing. *Fourth*, the record is verified by other writers;

among them the heathen Macrobius, who says, "When Augustus had heard that among the children under two years old whom Herod had ordered to be slain was his own son, he said 'It is better to be Herod's swine than his son.'" Origen, in his controversy with Celsus the pagan satirist, says without contradiction, "Herod put to death all the little children in Bethlehem and its borders, with the purpose of destroying the King of Israel who had been born there."

At this point we come upon another adaptation of ancient prophecy: "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they were not." This is found in Jeremiah 31 : 15. In Rama—the site of which is uncertain but probably not far from Bethlehem—the king of Babylon assembled his captives before leading them away from their beloved land. This was doubtless the immediate reference of the prophecy. The poetic beauty of its accommodation to the present instance is heightened by the fact that Rachel's tomb was "on the way to Bethlehem." It was as if this ancient mother in Israel were lamenting the death of these children as, of old, she was represented as coming from her grave to weep for the captivity of her people. There is a pathetic fitness, also, in the fact that the children of Bethlehem were brought thus into a martyr-fellowship with the sufferings of Jesus, who loved them so well.

3. *The coming to Nazareth.* The news of Herod's death was brought to Joseph by an angel, who said: "Arise, and take the young Child and his mother and go into the land of Israel." Again observe the unquestion-



ing readiness with which Joseph obeys the voice. "He arose and went." But on the way another message came: though Herod was dead, his son Archelaus, no less wicked and cruel, reigned in his room. Wherefore Joseph was counselled "to turn aside into the parts of Galilee." So it was that he "came and dwelt in Nazareth." All this was providential. If the parents of Jesus had been left to choose for themselves it is probable that they would have gone almost anywhere else. Nazareth was a notorious place. But there were reasons for its selection. *First*, it was secluded, being in a remote part of Palestine, far from danger and from the world's clamor; "set in the midst of gently sloping hills which rise about it like the edge of a shell to guard it from intrusion." *Second*, it was surrounded on every side by natural beauty which must have gladdened the heart of Jesus during his growing years. An old writer says, "Nazareth is a rose, having the same rounded form and enclosed by mountains as the flower by its leaves." *Third*, the very wickedness of its inhabitants would make it a proper home for Jesus, whose purpose was to save the world from sin. Let us learn from his example that a man need not be the creature of circumstances, but may rise above his environment and keep himself pure in the midst of impurity as a lily growing in the mire. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was a proverb. Jesus answered it. The most perfect character the world ever saw was developed amid the most adverse surroundings. Here is encouragement for all such as find themselves struggling under burdens of shame, poverty and hereditary hindrance. One can make a man of himself anywhere, and work out his destiny against the world, the flesh and the devil, if only God be with him.

Once more a prophecy accomplished: "that it might be fulfilled that was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." The reference is not to a specific prediction uttered by a single seer, but to the general tenor of what was said "by the prophets" respecting Jesus as the despised one. Thus it was written by Isaiah, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root\* out of a dry ground. He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and we esteemed him not."

Here we leave the divine Boy, in the home at Nazareth. Under the care of his loving parents he, despite his surroundings, will be growing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. The shadow of the cross is over him even now; but these years of preparation are needed before he may enter upon his great work. He can be content to wait. Nothing can hinder his great purpose. The blue skies above him are the assurance of his Father's love; and as the verdant hills enclose his village home so is the protecting care of his Father round about him.

\* The word is *nelsir*, which is said to be cognate with *Nazareth*; in any case there is a curious correspondence.

## THE YOUTH OF JESUS.

LUKE 2 : 40-52.

THE early years of Jesus were passed in retirement. A single verse tells all: "The child grew and waxed strong—filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him." What more could be said? "He grew." His physical and mental development was like that of other lads. There was no visible peculiarity in his constitution save in the matter of sinlessness. He had "a true body and a reasonable soul." He attended to the simple tasks of the home-life, learned his lesson at school, with flushed cheeks climbed the hills about Nazareth, laughed and played and generally behaved like other healthy boys. Thus "he grew." His sinews knit, his mind was disciplined, and his soul took on the graces that constitute character and challenge the favor of both God and man.

No part of human life is more important than this. It is the formative period, the time for girding the loins. The serious business of the work-a-day world must be prepared for. Silence and solitude are most helpful now. There will be enough of drum beat and trumpet's blare presently. A wise soldier—like Moses in Midian and Paul in the deserts of Arabia—will buckle on his harness before he issues from his tent. The Scriptures, therefore, have nothing to say of the doings and sayings of Jesus during these early years. It is only the Apocryphal gos-

pels that intrude, and they make a grotesque show of themselves in doing so.\*

One glimpse only is given. There were certain critical periods in the life of a Jewish youth. At three years of age he was given a tasselled garment, as directed by the law (Numbers 15:38-41). At five he learned the *shema* or creed, and began to commit to memory the Hallel psalms. At ten he commenced the study of the *Mishna*, a compendium of Scriptural exposition. At twelve he became *ben-hattorah*, "a son of the Law," assuming responsibility for his own conduct. At thirteen he put on the phylacteries, which Jews were accustomed to wear at their daily devotions. At eighteen he was permitted to take up the study of the *Gemara*, a collection of rabbinical traditions and interpretations.

It was at the age of twelve that Jesus made his first visit to Jerusalem with his parents. As this is the only occasion between his birth and ministry on which the veil is lifted we may be sure the incident was recorded for our profit. What shall we learn? There are lessons here of peculiar importance to the young.

1. *Here is something about going to school.* It is not said—indeed there was no occasion for mentioning the fact in connection with this incident—that Jesus attended the rabbinical schools, but the Jewish law respecting the education of youth makes it quite certain that he did so. It would be interesting to imagine him, sitting at the feet of the *sopherim*, conning the well-thumbed scrolls of Jew-

\* It is recorded in the Apocryphal books that Jesus wrought many miracles during his boyhood. He commanded the trees and they made obeisance before him; moulded sparrows out of clay and animated them by clapping his hands; changed unpleasant playmates into goats, and dried up useful fountains with a word!

ish history, learning "by heart" the prayers of David and the battle-hymns of ancient worthies. Did he work "examples" in arithmetic, after the method of that time, with sliding balls or a frame? In any case, "he grew in wisdom."

The youth of our time should be counselled to make their attendance on school something more than a perfunctory task. It is a necessary part of preparation for a useful life. The sword must be ground before it can do execution in the high places of the field. The diamond must be cut and polished before it can glitter in the king's crown. Knowledge is power: Every lesson well learned is a substantial addition to the possibilities of life. It is estimated that if a bar of iron, worth \$5 or thereabout, be worked over into horseshoes, it will assume a value of \$10 50; into needles, \$350; into knife-blades or razors, \$3,285; into balance-wheels for watches, \$250, 000. Education—from *educere*, to draw out—develops the natural force into capability and influence. It enables us to make the most of ourselves, to make our lives tell.

2. *Here is something about learning a trade.* Mark tells us that Jesus was a carpenter, as well as "the carpenter's son;" and, inasmuch as the Jewish law required that every boy should learn a trade\* and custom obliged him to keep in the rank of his father, we may regard it as quite certain that Jesus served his apprenticeship in the shop at Nazareth. Justin Martyr, who lived a century and a half later, speaks of the ploughs and yokes which Jesus had made. In Holman Hunt's well known picture of Jesus, he is represented as standing in the workshop, lifting his

\* It was a proverb among the Jews, "The father who fails to teach his son a trade teaches him to be a thief."

hands in weariness, chips and shavings about his feet, the implements of his trade on the bench before him. This is as it should be; for our Lord and Master came into the world to assume our nature and to enter into the experiences of our common life, to be "not a dreamer among the shadows but a man among men." If he would sympathize with the wants and sorrows of the great company of toilers he must fall in with the multitude who leave their homes at morning, dinner-pail in hand, and return at night weary with an honest day's work.

There are two kinds of people, producers and consumers; just as every hive has its drones and honey-makers. The mere consumers, though they clothe themselves in fine linen and fare sumptuously every day, are a burden on the earth. The youth who expects to live by the sweat of his father's brow is no better than a tramp. Bees sting the superfluous drones to death. Athens exiled or executed its incorrigible idlers. Paul said, "If a man will not work, neither let him eat." It behooves every man to find his place somewhere in the great fellowship of brain-craft and handicraft. "The Village Blacksmith" gives us a picture of true nobility:

"His brow is wet with honest sweat,  
He earns whate'er he can;  
He looks the whole world in the face,  
For he owes not any man."

Nor is it the boys alone who should be taught to earn an honest livelihood. There is a measure of truth in what some one has said, "In these times we send our boys out into the world to earn their living and the girls to beg their living of the boys." Any system of training which does not take into account the fact that our daughters—however independent now—may possibly be thrown upon

their own resources, is wrong. Henry Lawrence of South Carolina, imprisoned in London Tower during the Revolution, wrote thus to his daughter: "My dear, I greatly regret that I have never taught thee how to earn a livelihood; for now the wheel of fortune hath turned, and what wilt thou do?" Alas, the wheel of fortune is ever turning! Those who are up to-day may be down to-morrow; and what will they do? In the attics and basements of all our great cities there are women, brought up in affluence but now reduced to poverty, who are toiling hopelessly to keep soul and body together. They were never taught to provide for themselves, never forearmed against the turning of fortune's wheel; and what can they do?

3. *Here is something about obedience to parents.* It is written of Jesus that during these formative years at Nazareth "he was subject unto his parents." This means, in simple phrase, that he ran his mother's errands without murmuring, that in the workshop he received his orders from Joseph without complaint, and that even in early manhood he did not think obedience beneath him.

Our modern boys too soon grow restive under the restraint of mother's apron-strings. They are scarcely out of "roundabouts" before they feel themselves too big to obey. Let them heed the example of this blessed Boy of Nazareth. There is nothing better in the wide world than a father's authority, a mother's love. Do we think the less of Washington because he kept himself loyal to these sweet restraints long after he had come to the full stature of a man? There is no period of life whereat the precept "Honor thy father and thy mother" loses its binding force. The name of Absalom is a hissing and a by-word among the Jews to this day because of his filial ingratitude. He was the "black sheep" of the household

of David. He scorned obedience. He drove his father to bitter tears and unspeakable sorrow by his profligacy and rebellion. And even now no Jew will pass the spot which is pointed out as Absalom's tomb without muttering an imprecation and casting a stone at it. It was another and a wiser Hebrew who wrote: "The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out and the young eagles shall eat it."

The record of the perfect life of Jesus would not be complete without this word respecting his filial love and obedience. It is noted that the name of Joseph is mentioned in this incident for the last time. The probability is that he died while Jesus was still at Nazareth. If so, it may be assumed that the support of the widow and her household devolved upon her eldest son. To him it was surely a labor of love. And there are widows the world over who are leaning hard upon such sons; finding in this loyal devotion the reward of their travail and surcease of sorrow. The blessing of Heaven is upon those who honor their parents; the one "commandment with promise" is theirs: "that their days may be long in the land which the Lord their God giveth them."

4. *Here is something about going to church.* The boy Jesus had been used, as was the universal custom, to attend regularly the services of the village synagogue. It was an event in his life when, at twelve, he was permitted to go up with his parents to the Passover at Jerusalem. There was much in the place and the occasion to interest this devout youth. (1) Among the rabbis who ministered at this time were many of the most illustrious: Hillel and his famous opponent Shammai, heads of rival schools; Gamaliel, called "the flower of the Law," afterwards the



instructor of Saul of Tarsus ; Simeon, who subsequently occupied the seat of Hillel ; Jonathan, the compiler of the Hebrew paraphrase ; and Nicodemus, who " came to Jesus by night." (2) The minds of rabbis and people alike were occupied at this time by the institution of the Passover. The account of that awful night when the destroying angel hovered over the homes of Egypt and the Israelites marched out was recited over and over ; the prescribed sacrifices were offered ; and the temple rang with thanksgivings for the great deliverance. No other of the annual festivals was kept with so much solemnity as this. The Holy City was crowded, the surrounding hillsides covered with the tents of those who had come to participate in it. (3) To the boy Jesus all this had a deeper significance than it could possibly have had for any one else. There is every reason for believing that he knew himself, and while keeping his own counsel was conscious of his holy mission. The Spirit of God was always upon him ; the shadow of the cross was always over him. The Passover was an object-lesson of the deliverance which was presently to be wrought in his own redemptive death. What lofty meditations must have taken possession of his mind and heart during the celebration of this feast ! He himself was the antitype of the paschal lamb ; this sprinkled blood was a prophecy of the shedding of his own. (4) We may thus surmise the purport of the questions he asked and the answers given while he " sat in the midst of the doctors." We may be quite sure there was no unseemly display of precocity or forwardness. He knew, however, more than the wisest rabbi there respecting the great truths that centred in the Passover. Little wonder if they were " astonished at his understanding."

For the devout attendant there is always a blessing in the house of God. Let us learn from our Lord's example to honor its stated services. The Jews were a church-going people. One of their favorite hymns began, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." It is greatly to be feared that Christian people are over lax in this matter. The ringing of the church bell is our call to an appointment with the King. Let our hearts join in Israel's response:

"How pleased and blest was I,  
To hear the people cry,  
'Come, let us seek our God to-day.'"

5. *Here is something about duty.* When the parents of Jesus found him sitting among the doctors in the temple, and remonstrated with him, he answered, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"\* Thus the first recorded words of Jesus have to do with duty. (1) He speaks of his Father as having the supreme claim upon him. The turning point of any man's life is come when he can thus name the name of his Father. (2) He further signifies that the great truths which he has been discussing with the rabbis are important above all. No man has begun to live, certainly none has become "a son of the law," until he has confronted the great verities and mighty problems which reach out into the eternal ages. (3) Still further, he points out his life-work. The "Father's business" must henceforth be the business of his life. Afterwards he said, "I must work the works of Him that sent me." There is a great lesson in those words, "I must." The spirit of a useful and successful life is in

\* In the New Version it is, "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" The meaning is substantially the same.

them. No man is making the best of himself who does not feel the constant constraint of a divine needs-be. This is the meaning of the mighty word "ought," which, taken asunder, means, "I owe it." Duty is the expression of our indebtedness to God. To say in the face of duty, "I must," is to be following after Christ. To say this habitually is to find in duty a delight and our highest manhood in the performance of it.

"So nigh is glory to the dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When Duty whispers low, 'Thou must,'  
The youth replies, 'I can!'"

After the Passover our Lord returned with his parents to Nazareth and resumed the former manner of his life. But, whether mingling with his former townsmen in social converse or toiling alone in the carpenter-shop, he was never unmindful of his great duty. Though in the world, he was not of it; though cheerfully attending to secular matters, his heart was above them. The mending of ploughs and harrows, the gossip of the neighborhood, the microcosmic affairs of the domestic circle were of infinitesimal importance as related to the mighty things of the kingdom of God. And this kingdom was all about him; it folded him in, it held him fast with a tremendous, yet blessed, "Thou must!" So may we all be living in this present world, attending with a good conscience to all common tasks, yet ever hearkening to the call of heavenly voices and with clear eyes beholding the hands that beckon us to service in the kingdom of God.

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

MARK I : I-II.

“IN those days”—the days of the world’s despair. The lights were gone out in the sanctuary. There was no more open vision. The oracles were dumb. The gods, exposed and derided, had fallen from their pedestals and lay with their faces in the dust. The philosophers were put to an open shame. The rabbis of Israel were chattering about mint and anise and cummin. The people had settled down into confessed and hopeless apathy.

The spirit of the age found expression in such questions as, “Is there a God?” “What is truth?” “If a man die, will he live again?” “Is there anything better than to eat, drink, and be merry?”

“On that hard pagan world disgust  
And sated loathing fell ;  
Deep weariness and sated lust  
Made human life a hell.  
In his cool hall with haggard eyes  
The Roman noble lay ;  
He drove abroad in furious guise  
Along the Appian Way ;  
He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,  
And crowned his hair with flowers—  
No easier nor no quicker passed  
The impracticable hours.”

In those days there was a carpenter in the town of Nazareth who was destined to wield the sceptre of the world. He was waiting for the fulness of time, and meanwhile he wrought steadily at his lower tasks. The farmer

came with his wooden plough, the village dame with her decrepit furniture, and he mended them. The children of the village passed by his door; he smiled upon them, spoke a cheery word, and they went their way. As he stood among the shavings, plying the implements of his trade, he must oftentimes have murmured, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how is my soul straitened until it shall be accomplished!"

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching and saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Out of the wilderness, clad in a prophet's garb, with a hempen cord about his loins, a gaunt, stern man, he came. He announced the coming of the Christ. "The woodman cometh," he cried, "with an axe in his hand, and he will lay it at the root of the tree, and every barren tree shall be cut down and cast into the fire." "The winnower cometh," he cried, "with fan in hand, and he shall thoroughly purge the floor and the chaff shall be cast into unquenchable fire." A strange gospel this, a strange heralding of the Prince of Peace—the axe, the fan, and always the unquenchable fire! "Repent ye! repent ye! for He cometh whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to loose."

The air is close and heavy before the storm; the skies are yellow; we struggle for breath. Then comes the tempest; the clouds sweep overhead, the winds roar through the forest like voices of fury. The trees are twisted and torn, the windows above are opened. The skies are seamed with lurid lightnings, like knotted and swollen veins upon an angry face. Then comes the lull of the tempest, calm and silence, sunshine and the singing of birds, and you throw your shoulders back and breathe; the whole world is brighter and better for the

storm. So came John the Baptist, preaching of the axe and the winnowing-fan and preparing the way for the coming of the Prince of Peace.

One day he was baptizing at the water's edge at Bethabara. The bank of the swift Jordan was lined with the eager multitudes who had come thronging from Jerusalem and Judæa, the regions round about. "Repent ye! repent ye!" rang his voice above the roar of the swift-rolling, tumultuous river. "Cast up a highway for the coming of the King!" One and another of his hearers came down to the water's edge, saying, "I repent; baptize me." The day waned; it was towards eventide. Then one detached himself from the crowd and came down towards the river—a man of the people, in homespun garb, before whom the prophet of the wilderness quailed, and trembling cried, "Behold! behold the Lamb of God!"

And as Jesus came near he said, "Not thou, O Master. I am the unworthy one! I have need to be baptized of thee." And Jesus answered, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh me to fulfil all righteousness." Then the heavens were opened above and a blessed commerce began—prayers ascending and blessings returning—which never has ceased to this day. And down from above came the Spirit of God in form like a brooding dove, symbolizing the descent of peace to the sin-troubled world, and bringing to earth the peace of God that passeth all understanding. And a voice was heard, "This is my beloved Son." It was heard afterwards, again and again. Some said, "It thundereth," and they spake well, for it was indeed a tremendous truth that was uttered. "This is my beloved Son." O friend, have you ever heard it uttered in reverberating tones from heaven? "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him."

What was the significance of all this? What is the meaning of this baptism of Jesus? It was the formal induction into the active duties of his mediatorial office. He would return to the carpenter's shop no more. In vain shall the farmer bring his plough. Little children will look wonderingly at the closed door. The saw will hang against the wall, the dust lie thick upon the bench, the shavings be undisturbed on the floor. The carpenter of Nazareth has left his lower tasks and entered upon his ministry. The hour has come; his soul shall be straitened no more.

What does this mean for us?

1. To-day he enters with us into the fellowship of duty. "Thus it becometh us," he said, "to fulfil all righteousness." He was a loyal Jew, and the new economy had not begun as yet. If a son of Levi must be washed at the brazen laver on assuming his ministerial functions, so shall Jesus; but instead of the temple we have the deep valley and the overarching skies; instead of the laver, the swift-flowing Jordan; instead of the anointing, the descent of the dove, the Spirit of God.

This Jesus is the source and centre of all right precepts and injunctions; his heart is the throne of law; the writings of Sinai are the flashings of his eye; yet under the Law he bows and passes into servitude. Though equal with God, he took upon him the form of a servant and became obedient. The inaugural rite is his bounden duty; to obey is better than sacrifice. "Thus it becometh me, as the ideal man, the Son of man, to fulfil all righteousness." If he thus respected the humblest duty, then surely, beloved, the same is becoming in us.

There is no nobler word in all our vocabulary than "duty." Our mere apprehension of moral obligation is

the token of our divine lineage. An infant grasps at the stars. No offspring of the lower orders does it. Time passes, and the infant, grown to manhood, still reaches for the stars. But they are far away; and the interstellar spaces are infinite. The province of duty is our vast universe. When we have done our best we must still confess, "I count not myself to have apprehended." The stars are still far away. But this is God-like, to reach forth, to strive after character, to obey, to fulfil all righteousness to the utmost of our power. Jesus revered his duty; so let us bow to ours.

2. In this ordinance our blessed Lord comes with us into the fellowship of penitence. We mourn sometimes that at the tenderest point of human life and experience he cannot feel with us, for he was human in all points, yet without sin. He could not indeed mourn over personal sin. Of all the multitude that heard John's call to repentance, he alone could say, "I need it not."

And yet there is a sense in which Jesus can sympathize with our sorrow for sin. He took upon himself the burden of our transgressions; he identified himself with us in our attitude of guilt before the offended law. He was no sinner, and yet in our behalf he became the very chief of sinners, for the world's sin was laid upon him.

A strange thing happened recently in one of our courts of justice. A young man was asked if he had aught to say why the extreme penalty should not be passed upon him. At that moment a gray-haired man, his face furrowed with sorrow, stepped into the prisoner's box unhindered, placed his hand affectionately upon the culprit's shoulder, and said, "Your honor, we have nothing to say. The verdict which has been found against us is just. We have only to ask for mercy." "We?"—



there was nothing against this old father; yet in that moment he lost himself; he identified his very being with that of his wayward boy.

So Christ in this baptism pushes his way to a place beside us, lays his hand upon the sinner's shoulder, and bears the shame and sorrow with him. Oh, presently, up yonder, he will stand beside us again; we shall be silent and shamefaced, but he will speak: "Thou Judge of all the earth, true and righteous altogether, the sentence has gone forth justly against this man; but I have borne his penalty; my heart broke on Calvary under the burden of his sin; for my sake let him go free." So it is written, "He was numbered with the transgressors; he bare the sins of many; the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

3. He enters also in this inaugural ordinance into the fellowship of divine filiation with us. "Thou," said the voice from above, "art my beloved Son." We were alienated from the Heavenly Father; but in the sonship of Jesus the way of restoration is opened unto us. He becomes the first-born among many brethren; in him we receive the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry "Abba! Father!"

Thanks be to God for this voice of thunder, "Thou art my Son." We have heard it reverberating along the corridors of truth. The Scriptures are full of the sonship of Jesus. He walks amid the oracles, his face like the sun shining in his strength. We have heard it in the story of personal experience: the sorrowing Magdalens, the penitent thieves, the weeping Peters of all the centuries, have certified to the grace of the Elder Brother as the only-begotten of God. We have heard it in history. There is a mingled sound of falling thrones and dynasties, of ham-

mers and trowels among the stones of rising temples, of the rustling wings of the angels of the morning, of the singing of the nations that were once in darkness and the shadow of death, like the sound of many waters, like the reverberance of the heavens, "This is my beloved Son." Oh, sweet and blessed fellowship! We are his humble brethren, and there is something more in Christ Jesus still before us: "Now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

The grace of the infinite God came down to earth as Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river side, and found us helpless, motherless, famishing. It has taken us up to the King's house, brought us to the King's table, clothed us in purple, and given us the assurance of a royal inheritance. We are also the sons and daughters of the living God. Not like Jesus indeed. Oh! there is a bridgeless gulf between his affiliation with God and ours; he is the "Only-Begotten;" and yet we are acknowledged in the Beloved as children of God. The time will come when the full significance of this will be revealed to us. Meanwhile we pass here our years of apprenticeship; doing faithful work in the province of duty; earnest, steadfast, hopeful; mending ploughs and harrows in the shop, until one bright day we too shall be called away to hear the voice, "Thou art my beloved son!" Let us bow our backs cheerfully to the burden; let us acquiesce in salutary discipline; let us with lowly hearts receive the full blessing of our divine adoption; and oh! let us love with pure hearts, fervently, this Brother of ours, by whose mediation we have the great inheritance, whose hand will presently lead us through the door of the Father's house, where we shall abide as members of the family of God!

## THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS.

MATT. 4 : I-II.

THE common opinion is that no episode in the life of Jesus is more difficult to understand than his temptation in the wilderness. Nevertheless it is just here that he makes his nearest approach to us. There is nothing in the world more human than temptation. Possibly, indeed, here is the secret of the difficulty. It is easier to view a mountain from a mile away than when standing at its foot. The mind grasps the divine and marvellous in Jesus' life the more readily because of its great remove; but this temptation is so near, so human, so almost commonplace. We want to set Jesus off by himself, but here he pushes his way into our every-day affairs and makes himself distinctly one among us. Our two eyes have their point of vision fixed towards the gates of glory; but this thing that happens in the wilderness of Quarantania is just beside our doors. The focus is too near. We were looking for the extraordinary, but this is quite common, quite like the experience of the average man.

We shall be helped in our study of this event if we settle a few things at the outset. *First*, this narrative is not a poem nor a parable, nor anything of that sort, but an account of an actual occurrence. *Second*, the temptation to which Jesus was subjected was a real temptation. He was brought into contact with the hour and power of darkness; otherwise it would not be correct to say he "was tempted in all points like as we are." The question raised by the schoolmen, whether the resisting

power of Jesus lay in *posse non peccare* or *non posse peccare*—that is, in his being unable to sin or able not to sin—has nothing to do with the matter. The fact that there was no inherent depravity in Jesus on which the temptation could lay hold has no bearing on the case. There is no sin in being tempted, only in yielding to it. The shield of a true knight may bear the dint of a thousand arrows; he is slain only by the one arrow that pierces it. It has been wisely said: "If we shrink from believing that our Lord actually felt the force of temptation, we make that divine life a mere mimic representation of griefs that were not real, and surprises that were feigned, and sorrows that were theatrical." And so doing we lose the helpfulness of his example. *Third*, the Spirit of God himself was mightily present in this episode. Matthew says: "Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Mark says: "The Spirit driveth him into the wilderness." The temptation itself was wholly the work of the devil, but it was God who placed Jesus in the way of it. There is nothing surprising in this if it be true that trial is necessary to character. A wise parent frequently exposes his children to trial which he knows to be an essential part of discipline. At the battle of Cressy word was brought to the king that his son, the Black Prince, was in sore need of reinforcements, being exposed to danger in a distant part of the field. "Is he wounded unto death?" asked the king. "No, your majesty." "Is he made captive?" "No, your majesty." "Then go tell the prince that he hath the chance to win his spurs this day." *Fourth*, this temptation of Jesus occurred at the very beginning of his ministry. It followed close upon his baptism—the formal rite of induction into his mediatorial office—when the

voice from above said, "This is my beloved Son." He is now about to enter upon a campaign of three years of toil, controversy, and conflict for souls. These forty days in the wilderness are for the buckling on of his armor and the girding of his loins. Here he confronts the adversary and makes himself at once familiar with his malignant face and abominable devices. After this trying experience he can never be taken by surprise. He knows his enemy, he has confronted him in the solitudes, he has turned his weapons at every point. Thus, both forewarned and forearmed, he goes forth to meet him.

In the study of this occurrence we shall perceive that the three temptations to which Jesus was here exposed were of such a character as to embrace in substance all the temptations whatsoever to which his people are liable. Wherefore it is written: "He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

*The first temptation* was toward the sordidness of life. It was after his forty days of fasting that the adversary came saying: "Command that these stones be made bread." The most of mankind are living a mere bread-and-butter life. To many this is a matter of preference: they make the pleasures of self-gratification their *summum bonum*. To pamper the body, to cultivate the mind, to win applause, these are far above such considerations as take hold on the unseen and eternal. But to multitudes of others the sordid pursuits of a mere worldly life are in the nature of an apparent necessity. The earning of a livelihood absorbs their time and energies. What shall we eat? and, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? are the burden of their life. The workshop and the office hem them in from morning till night. God and Eternity are crowded aside. These things can wait; but the chill of

winter and the gnawings of hunger will brook no postponement. Thus it is that the church laments her inability to win the working classes. No doubt the fault is largely hers; but the fact itself is old as human nature. The multitudes have always been "lapsed." The question of work and wages has always jostled hard the larger question, "How shall a man be just with God?" Food and shelter are nearer needs than truth and everlasting life. After his long fasting in the wilderness Jesus "was an hungered." His famished body was crying out for bread. Under just such conditions shipwrecked mariners have been known in utter desperation to make for themselves a cannibal feast. "Now," said the adversary, "is my time. Cause that these stones should be made bread!" And why not? A word of Jesus' would have done it. But in yielding to the temptation he would have fallen in with the great multitude who make bread the chief matter of life. To him the kingdom of God must be everything. To die of hunger would be a thousand-fold better than to fall short of the true nobleness of life. "Nay," he answered, "it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." This was but anticipating the precept which was to run through all his after teaching: "Why take ye thought for food and raiment? Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

*The second temptation* was toward presumption. Our Lord was conscious of his divine character and mission; but how few there were who believed on him. It would be a stupendous task to convince the world of his Messiahship. Even the Jews, who were looking for Shiloh to come arrayed in regal splendor, would reject him. "The

light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not." The people would be asking on every side, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" Appearances were against him. And Jesus knew this. Imagine, then, with what tremendous power the words of the tempter must have appealed to him: "Thou knowest thyself; thou knowest the unbelief of the people; thou knowest they will not receive a Messiah in homespun and with callous hands. Why not give public proof of thy divinity at once? The Jews are looking for Messiah to descend from the clouds: Cast thyself from this lofty pinnacle, in the presence of the worshipping assembly, and let them behold thee upheld by angel hands and alighting in godlike majesty! So brilliant a miracle as this would be a fit beginning for thy ministry. Thou believest in thy Godhood—try it, prove it, let the multitude behold it! If thou art really divine the Father will protect thee; is it not written, He shall give his angels charge over thee?"

To know the full power of this temptation we must be mindful of Christ's all-consuming desire to commend himself as the chosen of God. His supreme wish was that men should believe on him, for thus to believe was to enter into life. And the suggestion of Satan was so plausible! Why should the multitudes be left in doubt when it would be so easy to convince them? Yet he could not yield to it. The plan of his ministry had been marked out; he could not swerve from it. The people must be drawn with "the cords of a man." By gracious words, by kindly deeds, by the glory of an immaculate walk and conversation, by bearing and forbearing, by manifesting forth the wisdom of the Father in respect to the endless hereafter, so must he commend himself as the only begotten and well-beloved Son. He could afford to

wait, and be patient, because he saw down the centuries and knew the end from the beginning. In any case he could not thwart the eternal plans. He could not for the sake of a splendid but temporary gain set himself against the Father's purpose. Thus he answered: "I cannot! For it is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

How often we are placed just there. How often our own wisdom—which then is the suggestion of the adversary—sets itself against what we know to be God's plans and purposes concerning us. In our work as ministers of the gospel we are constantly drawn towards methods against which conscience revolts. All forms of Christian work are liable to the same danger. Things go so slowly: why not hurry them? Wait! "Bide a wee, and dinna weary." It is only children who dig up seeds to hasten their growth. If we are God's, our work is his work as really as was the work of Jesus. To push aside his plans for our own is to tempt him. To wait upon the Lord and not lose heart is the sign of a good servant. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Therefore Jesus answered, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

*The third temptation* was towards the avoidance of hard duty. The purpose of Jesus Christ in coming into the world was to save it by dying for it. It was an awful thing that was required of him. He must endure the scorn and buffetings of men, drink the cup of Gethsemane, and end his earthly career in the anguish of the cross. There was indeed no other way. But Satan proposed another way: From the summit of the mountain he waved his hand towards the kingdoms of the world and said, "All these are mine. Whether by right or not, thou



knowest I am the prince of this world. I am aware of thy purpose, to win the world by dying for it. But why shouldst thou bear the long shame and anguish? Let me show thee an easier and better way. The kingdoms of this world are at my disposal: if thou wilt bow down and worship me, they shall be thine. Abandon thy scheme of making all men pure and holy; be content with gaining dominion over them. To this end thy plan of patient suffering is not necessary. One act of homage and I will abdicate!"

To one so really and intensely human as Jesus, shrinking from pain and dreading death, this was a most specious appeal. But he knew that redemption for the race could only be accomplished in the way which had been divinely marked out. It had been ordained that he should die; he must die, because it was not possible otherwise that sinners should be reconciled with God. He must uplift the sins of the world, like a mighty Atlas, and bear them on the tree. It had been written, "Blood maketh an atonement for the soul;" it remained to be written, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and he must write it. This was duty. Duty is to follow out the divine purpose respecting us. Jesus could not turn aside. And surely he could not turn aside in a manner that would sever him from the Father and ally him with the prince of darkness. Wherefore he answered, "I cannot; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

"Then the devil leaveth him, and angels came and ministered unto him." He had come unscathed out of his great trial. The prince of darkness had tried all the joints of his harness and found no weakness anywhere. So, vindicated and strengthened, the Son of God went forth

from the wilderness to accomplish the redemption of the world.

Let us learn from this incident, *first*, that we have to do with a real adversary. In what form he appeared to Jesus it is not possible to say,\* but there is no room to question his real personality. Though finite, and of limited power, he is superhumanly crafty and malignant. We have constant need to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one."

Our *second* lesson is that, when tempted, we have an almighty Friend. "We have not a high-priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4 : 15). "For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 2 : 18). If we ever yield it is because we will not allow him to help us.

And our *third* lesson is that the Scriptures are a sure defense in the hour of trial. The three answers of Jesus were from the book of Deuteronomy, the maxims and precepts of which were used in the instruction of Jewish youth from their earliest years. It was not in vain that Jesus had learned the Scriptures in the rabbinical schools and at his mother's knee. Alas, for the man who, in the stress of temptation, has no reliance on the heavenly oracles ! Let us be true to the Bible. A man who has lost his Bible is like a hard-bested knight with a broken sword. The sword of the Spirit is our only trustworthy weapon of defense : and "the sword of the Spirit is the word of God."

\* Some of the fathers held that he appeared as an angel of light ; others, as a wayfaring man ; others as a venerable priest.

## THE FIRST DISCIPLES OF JESUS.

JOHN I. 35-49.

OUR Lord came into the world to set up a kingdom. His baptism was the initiatory rite by which he was publicly set apart. His temptation in the wilderness was the formal girding on of his harness preparatory to his conflict with the prince of this world. Then came the calling of his disciples, who were to be at once his body-guard and cabinet. These men were such as no earthly ruler, probably, would have chosen.

*First.* They belonged to the working class. Our Lord foresaw and intended that his church should be chiefly recruited not from the ranks of the indolent aristocracy on the one hand, nor from the multitude of shiftless ne'er-do-weels on the other, but from that admirable and ever-increasing body of producers whose braincraft and handi-craft are the mainstay of society and government the world over. To understand the full significance of this fact it must be remembered that at the beginning of the Christian era labor was held in disrepute. Work was regarded as the business of slaves. The vast majority of the Roman people were mere hangers on, fed by civil charity and dividing their time between the baths and the forum. The appeal of this Nazarene Carpenter was neither to arrogant patricians nor to lounging plebeians, but to such as were ranked, like himself, with bondmen.

*Second.* They were unlearned men. The best among them had probably no education beyond what could be gotten in the rabbinical schools. The wisdom of such se-

lection would be difficult to understand did we not know that the saving truths of the Gospel, the mighty truths which were to furnish the foundation of Christ's kingdom, are all within the grasp of simple folk. It does indeed involve great mysteries, beyond the ken of the wisest; but its fundamentals are as plain as the inscriptions on the ancient guide-boards pointing to the cities of refuge. "The river is so deep that a philosopher may drown in it, yet so shallow that a lamb may wade through." The moment we begin to resolve the plan of salvation into a profound system of theology we lose the power of it. Thus Jesus said: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

*Third.* The disciples were chosen from among those who were waiting and watching for the coming of Messiah. There were many such in Israel and, doubtless, also among the other nations. There was a general impression just then that the appointed time was near, that the predictions of a coming Deliverer—abounding in the Hebrew Scriptures and finding an echo in the expectant longings of the pagan world—were about to be fulfilled. Old Simeon in the temple was not alone in his vigils; the astrologers who followed the star of Bethlehem were not the only wise men who watched for heavenly harbingers. God ever honors the truth-seeker. His richest revelations come to watchers for the dawn. The gift is for the asker, the treasure is for the seeker, the door is opened to him that knocketh. On the back of that wonderful picture "The Light of the World"—representing a kingly form standing, lantern in hand, before a fast-closed door—painted by Holman Hunt as a memorial of his own conversion, are the words, "Lord, pass me not by!" The King passes none by who sincerely desire to receive him.

*Fourth.* Those who were chosen to be Christ's disciples were instant in their desire to confess him. There was no hesitation when once they were satisfied that he was the very Christ. They could not have kept silence if they would. The Spirit within constrained them. Their new-found joy was like a burning fire in their bones. They must tell of it, they must bring others to share it.

*Fifth.* They were not called without reference to their natural fitness for the work of the kingdom. Observe the various elements of power in this vanguard of five who were chosen at the banks of the Jordan: (1) *John*, the disciple of love; modest, never mentioning his own name nor parading his achievements; always ready, earnest, energetic, insomuch that he was called "a son of thunder;" fearless, abiding at the Cross when his comrades fled in panic; persistent, never faltering in loyalty to Jesus during his lifetime of a hundred years; first of the disciples to be chosen, he outlived them all. (2) *Andrew*, known chiefly as the brother of Peter; keeping himself in the background of the Gospel narrative; eager to know the truth (Mark 13:3), ready to serve in every humble way (John 6:8), constantly on the alert to increase the glory of his Master (John 12:22), faithful in the ranks (Acts 1:13), and crowning his life with a glorious martyrdom. (3) *Simon Peter*, brave, with occasional lapses of cowardice; impulsive and headstrong, but with his heart always in the right place; called Cephas, "a stone," on account of his loyal adherence to Jesus. It was he who made the good confession, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God," and because of his devotion to this fundamental truth of the gospel—making him, as it were, a stone hewn from the Rock of Ages—he was made a leader of the apostles. On his confession of Christ's godhood

the church was founded, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (4) *Philip*, an eager inquirer; desiring above all things to know God and satisfied to find him revealed in Jesus (John 14:8), known in the early history of the church as "one of the great lights of Asia." (5) *Nathanael*, called also Bartholomew; "an Israelite without guile," that is, free from self-deception or hypocrisy; frank, ingenuous; an honest doubter, glad to have his doubts resolved, and quick to embrace the truth when convinced of it.

From the manner of the calling of these disciples we gather certain truths respecting the great propaganda, the winning of the world to the knowledge of Christ.

*First.* The great Lodestone is Christ himself. John the Baptist set forth the gist and marrow of the whole gospel when he "stood and said, Behold the Lamb of God!" There is no true preaching other than this. In vain are all the arts of Sunday-school teaching if Christ be left out. The truths of science and philosophy, of theology and ethics, are helpful as far as they go, but without the doctrines of Christ they have no power to save. They are like the briny ocean to a wrecked mariner dying of thirst:

"Water, water everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water everywhere,  
And not a drop to drink."

The power of the endless life is in those words, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (1.) They announce the divineness of Christ. The children of Israel had, from the time of Abel's sacrifice, been offering lambs upon the altar, but they were only types of another, "a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they." Now comes the

divine One, the consummation of all the prophetic symbols of the old economy, the Lamb of God. (2.) Still further, they declare the need of sacrifice. The mere suggestion of the Lamb has in it the outlines of the cross. All the sin-offerings of the ceremonial law pointed forward to the vicarious death of the only begotten Son of God. To reject the vital necessity of the death of Jesus as the central, life-giving fact of the gospel, is to make a mere dumb-show of the whole Levitical economy. All things in the tabernacle were sprinkled with blood—blood on the brazen altar, blood on the posts, the curtains, the table of shew-bread, the golden candlestick, the laver, the veil of the Holiest, the golden cover of the ark—blood everywhere. What did it mean? Nothing, nothing in the world, unless it meant that One was coming who should fulfill in himself the pardoning virtue which was symbolically ascribed to all the lambs that were ever slain to make atonement for sin. (3.) The word "behold" suggests the need of looking to Jesus for salvation. His death opens up the possibility of life; but that possibility is realized only when faith appropriates it. Water in the fountain does not satisfy thirst; we must dip it up and drink it. The manna that lay upon the ground like hoarfrost was free and plenteous, but it satisfied the hunger of only such as partook of it. Christ died to save all, but only those are saved who accept him. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." The command is, Look and live! Behold the Lamb of God!

*Second.* Our Lord himself set the pattern of true preaching and teaching for all time when he said to John and Andrew, "Come and see."

He had been pointed out to them by John the Baptist. Overwhelmed by the thought that at last they beheld the Messiah of their hopes and dreams they rose and followed after him. Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith, "What seek ye?"

"Master," they asked, "where dwellest thou?"

He saith unto them, "Come and see."

This conversation occurred "about the tenth hour of the day;" or, according to the Roman mode of reckoning, at ten in the morning. They went with Jesus and abode with him all that day.

It is vain to conjecture as to their converse during those blessed hours; but we are safe in saying that, after his custom, he opened unto them the Scriptures touching himself. No doubt he explained the types and symbols and cleared up many of the Messianic prophecies. They betrayed their prejudices against a Messiah of obscure birth and station, and he reasoned these away. And when they left his humble dwelling it was with a joyful assurance that he was the very Son of God.

To "come and see" is all that Jesus asks of any honest seeker after truth. He makes no overtures to mere curiosity, but his heart goes out to those who earnestly seek to know him. And there are many such.

"We walk at high noon, and the bells  
Call to a thousand oracles :  
And the sound deafens, and the light  
Is stronger than our dazzled sight.  
Still struggles in the age's breast,  
With deepening agony of quest,  
The old inquiry, '*Art thou he,*  
*Or look we for the Christ to be ?*'"

It is a legitimate inquiry; and the business of every



earnest man should be to solve it. But the only honest and effective way to solve it is not to consult our own prejudgments, nor to seek the opinions of others as bewildered as ourselves, but to go straight to Christ himself. Sit down with him in the trysting-place and bend over the prophecies; hear him present his divine credentials and declare his own redemptive grace. This is the fair and manly thing to do. And no man ever yet pursued this method, sincerely, earnestly, without discovering in Jesus an answer to all the deepest longings of his soul.

*Third.* Philip and Andrew set the example of true service when they found their friends and brought them to Christ. "Andrew findeth his own brother Simon," "Philip findeth Nathanael," and brings him to Jesus. Finding and bringing will yet save the world. One of the themes of discussion at a recent ministerial conference was, "The secret of winning the masses." There is no secret about it. We will win the masses whenever we rightly go after them. Jesus himself seems not to have been able to save the world by standing at the threshold of heaven and beckoning. He went out after it. And in marking out the campaign of the gospel he said to his disciples, "Go ye." Paul won Macedonia when he went out after it. Adoniram Judson won the Karens when he went out after them. The Salvation Army is winning "the unchurched multitudes" because it is going after them. "City Missions" means to "go into the streets and lanes;" down into the slums and up into the attics. "Home Missions" means to "go out into the highways and hedges." "Foreign Missions" means to "go into all the world and preach the gospel." But it is always "go," and always "constrain them to come in."

Our message is: "We have found Him of whom

Moses and the prophets did write." Blessed *eureka!* We longed, we searched, we found!

The world's unvarying answer is, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael was a guileless man but he had serious doubts at this point. Nor could those doubts be waved aside without argument. No man can believe in the Messiahship of the Nazarene Carpenter until sound reasoning shall convince him of it. And the effective argument is found only in personal converse with Christ. Our work, therefore, is to bring the people face to face with him. Philip echoed the "Come and see" of the Master himself, and so brought Nathanael to Jesus. Once there, his conversion was sure. Nathanael, convinced of the superhuman character of Jesus, was moved to say, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel."

Thus the church grows, soul by soul. "One lighted torch lights another." The converts come as rapidly as we go out and bring them in. And in the good work Philip and Andrew are happiest of all. Theirs is "the generous pleasure of the kindly deed." There is no delight in heaven or on earth beyond that of plucking a brand from the burning. Rutherford longed unspeakably to see the fruit of his labors. He wrote:

"Oh, if one soul from Anworth  
Meet me at God's right hand,  
My heaven will be two heavens  
In Emmanuel's land!"

He lived to see the desire of his heart. No one ever yet went out after the wandering without, soon or later, bringing some in. The Lord make us faithful.

## FIRST MIRACLE OF JESUS.

JOHN 2: 1-11.

WE are standing on the border between the preparatory period in our Saviour's life and the active work of his ministry. He is bidding farewell to the past. In his home-life he had been subject to his parents, but his mother was henceforth to be so separated from him in his great mission as that he would be moved to say, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" He had been a carpenter, but he now hung up the implements of his trade, crossed the threshold of his shop and closed the door behind him. His work began. From this time onward he must be about his Father's business. He must journey for a period of three toilsome and eventful years along the path leading to the cross.

His first sermon was preached three days ago in the presence of a little group by the side of the Jordan. One of his hearers was Nathanael, who was so amazed as to cry, "Thou art the Son of God!" To which Jesus answered, "Marvel not at this; thou shalt see and hear yet more wonderful things. Thou shalt see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Observe the turn of expression: Nathanael had called him "Son of God;" he added the complementary title, "Son of man." He must indeed show himself to be both in order to be the world's Saviour.

This Nathanael lived in the little town of Cana, in the hill country, a few miles north of Nazareth. It was probably through him that Jesus and his mother were

invited to this marriage. A wedding was a great affair in those days. The ceremony was attended with the most elaborate solemnities, and was followed by days, sometimes weeks, of feasting and merry-making. It is pleasant to see how easily and naturally our Lord, at the very outset of his ministry, took his place in the common affairs of life. In this he showed himself the veritable Son of man. He was no anchorite, like John the Baptist, but came "eating and drinking." He entered into the enjoyments of social and domestic life. He was in cordial sympathy with friendship, companionship, laughter, and innocent delight. He did not deport himself like a wall-flower at the wedding; he did not throw cold water upon the festivities. He made himself a part of the occasion. We love to think of him thus; it brings him nearer and makes him more thoroughly our kinsman. The mother of Jesus knew somewhat of his nature and work. In her strange motherhood she had entered into the mystery of the Incarnation: there were many things pertaining to her divine Son which "she kept in her heart." And now that he had cut loose from his village life at Nazareth she must have been aware that he was entering upon the work of the kingdom. This was her "mother's secret." She doubtless thought he would presently give some startling token of his superhuman glory. It was thus that in the emergency she spoke to him: "They have no wine." Perhaps the hosts on this occasion were poor. It seems to have been a peasant's wedding. At any rate the supply of wine had given out. She could not have divined just how her Son would relieve their embarrassment, but possibly "his hour" was come. The rebuke which he uttered was respectful but emphatic: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" The old life

was behind him, he had crossed the Rubicon, thenceforth he must be his own counsellor. His hour would not come until he should glorify himself upon the cross. But the old relationships were gone; his feet were in the pathway leading to the wine-press which he must tread alone. Not even a mother's love must dictate or intrude. Nevertheless she knew him, his divineness, the greatness and goodness of his heart. So to the servants she quietly said, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Then came the wonderful thing.

1. This is spoken of as a miracle. What is a miracle? Not a violation of law, but rather a divine work wrought in accordance with an unknown or unfamiliar law. Are we to suppose that God has revealed all his resources? Kings and cabinets have their State secrets, why not the Infinite One? It has pleased him to unveil some of his ways of working; but how many he holds in reserve we know not. In 1860 the standing army of the United States consisted of about twenty thousand men. The roar of the cannon at Sumter was the signal for calling out "the reserves;" they came from everywhere, singing as they marched, "We are coming, Father Abraham, a hundred thousand strong!" Presently there were a million men engaged. God also has reserves which he may summon at will. Now and then we mark the operation of an unknown law, and catch glimpses of the divine power previously unknown to us, and we cry "Wonderful!" It may be that such wonders will be forever bursting upon us; as to one gazing on the natural heavens new stars come ever wheeling into view.

2. This was "the beginning of miracles." All miracles which are alleged to have been done during the earlier life of Jesus are purely apocryphal, and had their

origin in the imaginative brain of early monks and dreamers. But we shall see them henceforth crowding thick and fast along the whole period of our Lord's ministry, and all intended to furnish credentials for his great redemptive work, showing him to be the very Son of God. Alexander the Great reared monuments along the way while pursuing his oriental campaign, on which was inscribed: "Alexander, the divine, bow down and worship!" The miracles of Jesus were testimonials to his divine glory, and one by one they furnished cumulative evidence, until when he reached Calvary the argument was complete. By that time all should have been convinced that Jesus was the Christ, mightiest of the mighty, able to save unto the uttermost all who would come unto him. The final consummation of his miracles, the last of the long progression, was reached in the resurrection, whereof it is written: "He thus proved himself with power to be the Son of God."

3. This turning of the water into wine was a miracle of simplicity. In an ancient fresco in one of the great cathedrals, our Lord is represented as waving his wand over the water pots, his lips parted as if to utter some charm or cabalistic phrase. But there was nothing of the sort. It is for wizards to cry "Presto, change!" Jesus strove at no spectacular effects. He uttered not a word.

"The modest water, touched by grace divine,  
Confessed its Lord and blushed itself to wine."

This was godlike; it was after the analogy of God's work in nature. We never hear the springing of a shoot or the bursting of a flower. While the harvests grow and ripen to feed the hunger of the world they give no token. If a boulder is to be gotten out of the way on Harlem

heights, the neighborhood is startled by the blast; but God levels the mountains and fills the chasms by the imperceptible power of the atmosphere and silent distillation of the dews. If a man journeys in haste from Union Square to Castle Garden his carriage rattles so that everybody turns to see; but the stars of heaven roll round in their orbits a thousand times more rapidly than our fastest conveyance, so noiselessly that the singing birds are undisturbed.

“What though in solemn silence all  
Move round this dark, terrestrial ball,  
What though no real voice nor sound  
Amid their radiant orbs be found,  
In reason's ear they all rejoice  
And utter forth a glorious voice,  
Forever singing as they shine:  
The hand that made us DIVINE.”

As it is in nature, so in grace; “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” The beginnings of the spiritual life are in silence and solitude, most frequently in the trysting place. The temple of the Lord is rising upon the earth without the sound of ax or hammer; no blast of trumpet, no waving of banners. The tears of Jesus are quietly but surely being transformed into the sacramental wine of the millennium. The influence of his grace cometh down like rain upon the mown grass.

The great power is in the doctrine of the Atonement, which is indeed the simplest of doctrines. When we attempt to philosophize about it we are in wondering mazes lost. Yonder is the cross; and God's Son paying the penalty of sin is dying upon it. Here is the sinner under sentence of spiritual and eternal death. The uplifted eye and the outreached hand of faith, beholding, grasping—

this is salvation. And that is all! This is the glorious truth which is doing its transforming work among the nations and in the hearts of men. It is like leaven which a woman took and put in three measures of meal, which leavened the whole lump.

4. This was a miracle of kindness. The fact is worth noting that *kind* and *kin* are cognate words. The phrase of the great dramatist: "A little more than kin and less than kind" is more than a mere play upon words. It sets forth a glorious truth: kindness is born of the sense of kinship. We love one another and enter into the sweet uses of sympathy when we learn that we are brethren, in that there is one God and Father of us all. The Son of God took not upon himself the nature of angels but of men, and became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, that he might be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, that so he might sympathize with us. Does it seem a trivial thing for Jesus to have relieved the embarrassment of the bridegroom at this feast? In view of the demands of oriental hospitality we may readily understand the man's chagrin by reason of the failing of the wine. It would be a stigma on the nuptials. It was therefore a most gracious thing in Jesus to be willing to help. It is trifles that most annoy us. More men are stung to death by insects than eaten by lions, in this world of ours. A few days ago a man worth a million committed suicide because he had been defrauded of three hundred dollars. Trifles tell, and Jesus knew it. Oh, would that we were better acquainted with him, his loving heart, his willingness to hear and help in the small trials and embarrassments of our daily life! Let us give him our confidence, let us tell him all.

5. This was a miracle of condescension. He could



have wrought alone but preferred to enlist the services of those about him. "Fill the waterpots," said he. And they filled them to the brim.

Thus the farmer permits his little son to hold the plow-handles, and the lad imagines himself a tiller of the fields. Had these servants looked into the water pots, after filling them, what would they have seen? Water still.

The disciples of Jesus wrought with him in his ministry and went with him at last across the Kedron, up the slopes of Olivet, to the very shadow of the olive-trees; but there he said, "Tarry ye here while I go yonder." Then passing into the deep darkness all alone he put the cup to his lips. The wine-press was for himself; "and there was none with him."

We busy ourselves in the Master's work, running to and fro, sending and fetching in the great propaganda; and this must needs be, for, as our individual salvation is conditioned on the exercise of faith, so does the world's redemption wait upon our zeal. Nevertheless, God does it all. The children of Israel made great preparations for their departure from the land of bondage: got their effects together, laid in provisions, sprinkled the blood upon their door-posts, girded their loins, took staff in hand, and journeyed forth. It was not long, however, before they reached the end of their tether and were "shut up in the wilderness." Behind them were the six hundred chariots of Pharaoh, before them was the sea, and the mountains towered up on either side. As yet they had wrought nothing; they were in bondage still. Then came the voice: "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." At that word the Shekinah arose and like a meteor moved to the rear, to be darkness toward the Egyptians and light unto

Israel. At that word the east wind arose and swept back the water on either side in crystal walls. So they marched through, over the wet sands, over coral beds and stones covered with sea-weed, until they stood upon the other side. Then the song arose, "Who is like unto our God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" It was God's doing. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

Yet must we meet the conditions. "Fill up the water-pots." If we would be saved, if we would make our influence tell for the world's deliverance, we must do our part as God requires it. "Fill up the waterpots." Here is the waterpot of penitence: fill it with tears and He will transmute them into wine. Here is the waterpot of praise: fill it with tears of gratitude to the Mighty One who loves us, and He will change them into wine. Here is the waterpot of holy zeal: fill it with tears for the sorrows of a dying race, and God will presently bid thee draw forth the wine of the kingdom. Then, when our work is done, we ourselves delivered and others with us, we shall sit together at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and shall know then the full meaning of the words of the Master of the feast, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

## JESUS CLEANSING THE TEMPLE.

JOHN 2 : 13-25.

WE wonder at the deliberation with which Christ approached his ministry. He had only thirty-three years in which to accomplish all that had been appointed unto him ; yet thirty of these years were spent in the retirement of Nazareth. There was no haste. The world was dying for want of his redemptive grace, yet all must be done in fulness of time. There is everything in being well prepared. The fleeing knight, who, in sound of the foot-beat of his pursuers, dismounted to tighten his saddle-girth, lost nothing by the delay. It is a true proverb, "Well begun is half done." Hurry is a great hinderer.

And when, at length, Jesus stood at the very threshold of his ministry there was still no impatience, no precipitation. "Mine hour," he said, "is not yet come." There were important preliminaries that must be attended to. His baptism was the solemn rite of initiation into his sacerdotal office. His forty days in the wilderness were for the buckling on of his armor against the prince of darkness. The calling of the five at Jordan was the forming of the nucleus of his militant church. The "beginning of miracles" at Cana was his first showing of divine credentials. The cleansing of the temple marked his formal entrance upon his authoritative work as the Messiah. From this time onward he was to demonstrate his Godhood by the argument of progressive approach, in marvellous works and profound discourses on heavenly themes, one upon another following thick and fast,

until the consummation should be reached at Calvary, where in the sublimest of discourses and most wonderful of miracles he would prove himself forevermore to be the divine Lord and Saviour of men.

The temple was the centre of the old economy of rites and ceremonies, all of which were significant only as they pointed forward to the Christ. The temple itself was, indeed, significant of Christ, who is the living centre of religion. "Its stately decoration and ceremonial derived all their true meaning from the fact that it was the gorgeous crystallization of a divine idea embodied in his life." It was intended to set forth the possible approach of a sinful soul to a holy God; a thought which found its highest expression in Christ himself, the antitype of the temple, who said: "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." As the divine Presence was manifested in the Shechinah or "most excellent glory" which hovered over the Ark of the Covenant, so in Christ himself dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily; wherefore he spoke of himself as "One greater than the temple." The death of Jesus, as the beginning of a new economy, was to mark the end of the temple service, all its significance being fulfilled in him. At the instant when he yielded up the ghost the veil of the Holy of Holies was rent asunder: there was to be no more Shechinah, no more Ark of the Covenant, no more priesthood, no more sacrifice. Christ was thenceforward to be "his Father's house," its altar, high-priest, sacrifice, all in all.

In this light we can readily account for our Lord's interest in the holy edifice. It is easy to see why he twice entered and purged it, once at the beginning and again at the very close of his ministry. God had intended it to be a shrine of pure devotion, but it had been changed into

a foul nest of superstition. The things which Ezekiel saw when he looked "northward at the gate of the altar" were realized here: "Son of man, hast thou beheld what the ancients of Israel do, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not. He said also, Turn thee yet again and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do" (Ezekiel 8: 12, 13).

This visit of Jesus to the temple, like the later one, was made at the time of the Passover. Just when priests and people should have been wholly and humbly absorbed in contemplation of the great prophecy of redemption through the sprinkled blood, the holy place, transformed into a bazaar, was filled with the confusion of trade and barter. The Court of the Gentiles, which should have been thronged with aliens seeking the way of life, was given up to traffickers and money-changers. It was, indeed, more convenient for worshippers to buy their cattle and doves on the premises than to bring them from afar; and, as no coin bearing the image of Cæsar could be allowed in the sacred treasury, it was a further convenience to procure the Jewish half-shekel on the spot. But convenience at the cost of devotion was a dear purchase. God's house was in this manner made a house of merchandise.

This was the scene which met the Master's gaze. Should he, Lord and antitype of the temple, not be moved with holy indignation? "And when he had made a scourge of small cords—literally, of rushes from the scattered fodder of the cattle—he drove them all out." This scourge was obviously less a weapon than a symbol of authority. Why did they not resist it? Why did they not assail the presumptuous zealot and cast him headlong out of their midst? Ah, his seeming feebleness was rein-

forced by the tremendous power of their guilty consciences. This was the real scourge that whipped them out. "They writhed under its lashes ; corruption slunk away before the majesty of burning holiness, and the unrighteous practice fled before the heat of embodied justice on fire." Then it was that the few disciples who were with Jesus, standing by in dumb amazement, remembered how it had been written of him, "The zeal of thy *house* hath eaten me up."

For the right understanding of this incident there are certain things to be remembered : (1) It was a divine act. Jesus spoke of the temple not as "your Father's house," but as "My Father's house." In this he claimed to be peculiarly the Son of God. And might he not do what he would with his own? (1) The prophets had spoken of his solicitude for the temple. Malachi wrote : "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple ; he shall purify the sons of Levi" (Mal. 3 : 1-3). John the Baptist had said : "One cometh after me whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor ;" (Matt. 3 : 12.) David had predicted that Jesus would be consumed by his zeal for the sacred place (Psa. 69 : 9.) And Christ himself, eighteen years before this occurrence, had said, "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2 : 49. R. V.) (3) Our Lord in thus purging the temple displayed more than the courage of a reformer. His enemies were present in multitudes and might have crushed him in an instant. They must have been restrained by the same supernatural influence that so often afterwards prevented them from laying hands on him. The flaming eye, the majestic countenance, the commanding voice are scarcely enough to account for it. (4) The symbolical import of the temple

and its relation to Christ as its complete antitype and fulfillment must not be lost sight of. There is no need of borrowing fanciful parallels or strained correspondences. It is enough to say that the temple with all its elaborate cultus was an object-lesson and prophecy of Christ. He could not set up the new order without a due deference to the old. He honored the temple in his life and in his death abolished it.

Two lessons of great importance are to be learned from this incident. *First*, the zeal of Jesus for the purity of religion. His fan is ever in his hand and he is continually purging his floor. The traffickers and money-changers are in the church to-day. Self-interest is the mortal enemy of true devotion. God's house should be wholly free from all consideration of social or commercial advantage. There is no room here for "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preëminence." The church is a co-operative guild of Christians, bound together by a common faith in the Saviour, and pledged on the one hand to mutual helpfulness and on the other to the propagation of the gospel. Any one who does not accept the truth as it is in Jesus and acknowledge him as Lord and Master is out of place in this sacred fellowship. And the life must correspond with the motive. The inconsistencies of believers are like the uncleanness that littered the temple floor. A true Christian is as a light kindled at the sun; he must let his light so shine that others shall see his good works and glorify God. His influence is like salt, preserving and sweetening; but if the salt has lost its savor, what then? It is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. The way to purify the church is for each church member to purge out his own impurities. "Bring up the bottom of thy life," said

the Nonesuch Professor, "to the top of thy light." All such as have truly entered into fellowship with Christ are "a peculiar people;" peculiar in this: that they should show forth in a blameless walk and conversation "the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Our *second* lesson has reference to the catholicity of our faith. It was never God's purpose that the Gentiles should be excluded from the benefits of the true religion. The Jews were "chosen" not to the possession of an exclusive salvation, but to be the trustees of the Oracles, preserving them through the vicissitudes of history and handing them down along the generations for the ultimate deliverance of all people. The Gentiles were never for a moment cut off from the divine mercy or excluded from the promises of grace. The call to repentance and assurance of pardon were unto all men. It had been predicted that Messiah was to come, not for the sole benefit of Israel, but to be a light also unto the Gentiles. "In that day," saith the Lord, "there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the people; and he shall recover the remnant from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea." But Israel was not in sympathy with this catholicity of grace. As children of Abraham they arrogated to themselves the blessings of the Covenant and spoke of the Gentiles as dogs, aliens, and outcasts. Thus the Court of the Gentiles passed into disuse. Its original design was forgotten. In this court the hucksters and money-changers found room to set up their stalls and booths. We may believe that our Lord's design in driving them out was not merely to rid the temple of defilement, but to clear the



Court of the Gentiles that there might be still room and a welcome in the sanctuary for all sorts and conditions of men. It was indeed a divine reminder of the duty of universal evangelization. There are Christian churches which may well take the lesson to heart, churches that work in upon themselves, giving little or no thought to evangelization on the frontiers or in distant lands. They "do not believe in Foreign Missions." They have no "Court of the Gentiles," or else have blocked it up with narrow views of God's goodness and converted it to a wholly sordid use. Here is occasion for the reproach of the Master, who declared that his church should be "a house of prayer for all nations;" and here is room for his scourge of small cords. The man whose heart is not enlarged to love the remotest aliens and outcasts has not caught the spirit of Christ; and the church that does not extend a welcome to the stranger at its gates can only by a great stretch of the imagination be called a true church of God.

This cleansing of the temple was intended by our Lord to set forth and emphasize his authority as Messiah; yet no sooner was it done than the Jews were clamoring for a sign. He had already, in this very incident, given them two notable signs: his regard for purity and his zeal for the Father's work. "I will give you one more," said he: "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." This he spake concerning his resurrection from the dead. On another occasion he said, "There shall no sign be given you but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matt. 12: 39): three days and nights in darkness, then new light and life. Thus he adventured his whole work, his credentials and success, upon the one great miracle of his resurrection. That stands forever as the sign of his Godhood and of his triumph over

the powers of darkness in behalf of all who believe in him.

Two signs the Lord is giving all the while. One is his own character ; for of whom, of all who ever lived on earth, is it written, " he was without sin " ? The other is his holy zeal as a living Christ in history. The hands that were folded, pierced and helpless, over his silent heart when they bore him away to his sepulchre have ever since been tearing down strongholds of evil and up-building the kingdom of truth and righteousness. One sign more is yet to be given, when at his voice, sitting on the throne of Judgment, all that are in their graves shall come forth. In that day the truth will be manifest ; and all men, saved or unsaved, shall know beyond a peradventure that this Jesus is the very Christ of God.

## JESUS AND NICODEMUS.

JOHN 3:14, 15.

ONE night in Easter week a man sat in an upper chamber in the city of Jerusalem. It was late and he was alone. The lamp on his wall burned dimly. He was plainly clad and his hands were calloused with toil. It was plain to be seen that he was a man of the people. An open scroll lay before him, but he was not reading it. There was a far-away look in his eyes. He was communing with heaven, hearing distant voices—the hallelujahs of the kingdom. There was a step on the outer stairway, and a moment later a visitor entered. He wore a garment falling to his feet, a broad phylactery on his forearm, and a frontlet between his eyes whereon was written, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord!” He was an old Sanhedrist, one of the inner circle of Jewish wise men. What was he doing here? He closed the door quickly, glanced backward to assure himself that he was not followed, advanced, and made the customary salutation. The other arose, and bowing low, answered, “Peace be unto you.”

It was a notable meeting. And in the interview that followed there were wonders upon wonders. Our first surprise is at the very threshold. For it is passing strange that Nicodemus should have been received at all. There-

by we know that our Lord is willing to welcome the humblest and worst of us. This man was a moral coward, else he would not have come to Jesus under cover of the night. He feared the pointed finger, dreaded to have it known that he had visited the Nazarene teacher. Thrice only in the Scriptures is Nicodemus named, and always with this qualification, "The same came to Jesus by night." We may meet him some time in the kingdom: but if we do, the angel who introduces us will be likely to say, "This is Rabbi Nicodemus, the same who came to Jesus by night." Despite his cowardice, however, the Lord graciously received him. His motive was of the lowest; he was probably scourged thither by an uneasy conscience, by his fear of the torments which follow sin. All this was sufficiently selfish, yet the Lord did not reject him. Wherefore we conclude that there is a welcome for all, even unto the uttermost. The promise is, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Let no one hesitate to fling himself upon the heart of this Jesus; his hands beckon, his mercy is for all.

Not only was Nicodemus admitted to an audience that night, but to him were revealed some of the deepest and sublimest of truths. One of these was *Regeneration*. On entering he saluted the Nazarene prophet with a graceful compliment, "Master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God;" but under this formal greeting, deep down in his heart was a throbbing desire to know the way of everlasting life. Skilled in the art of forensic dissimulation, he gave no outward token of this longing; but the Lord saw it. At a glance he saw the case of Nicodemus through and through. And giving no heed to his courtesy, he proceeded straightway to the matter in hand: "I know the purpose of thy heart; I know thine aspiration after a nobler and a better life. Verily, verily I say unto

thee, except a man be born again he shall not see the kingdom of God." The Rabbi was bewildered. He was familiar with the learning of the rabbinical schools and the speculations of philosophy, but this being born again was all mystery to him. Thus to-day there are multitudes of learned men, professional men of broad culture and liberal education, who can scan their Virgils and quote from Aristotle, but know next to nothing about spiritual things. They are blind as bats with reference to those great problems which reach out unto the eternal world. Thus it is written, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned." There was hope for Nicodemus, however, inasmuch as he frankly confessed his ignorance. "How can these things be?" he exclaimed. The Lord must teach him as if he were a lad in a kindergarten. It was a gusty night; the wind whistling through the narrow streets furnishes the object-lesson. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The blowing of the wind is an undeniable fact despite the mystery attendant upon it; so also is the "gain-birth." We mark its tokens in the transformation of character as distinctly as we hear and feel the blowing of the wind. We may not understand, but as frank and sensible people we must needs acknowledge it.

The other truth revealed to Nicodemus in this interview was that of *Redemption*. The Lord having pierced this Rabbi's soul with the sharp dogma of regeneration, now brings the balm of redemption to mollify his wound: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Yet here again Nicodemus was amazed. All this was so contrary to his accus-

tomed way of thinking, so opposed to rabbinical notions and the tradition of the elders. He had been wont to reason along the lines of retribution; sowing and reaping made up his philosophy of justice: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." It was not strange that he stumbled now at the thought of the sinner's going scot free, at the innocent suffering for the guilty, at the saving virtue of faith. The Lord again found his object-lesson at hand. "Do you remember," said he, "how Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness?" It was an old story; the Hebrew people were all familiar with it.

The thing happened towards the close of the wilderness journey. For thirty-eight years and more the children of Israel had been going round about on their way to the Promised Land. It was a short journey in fact, and a few months should have accomplished it. But sins are clogs and fetters to a pilgrim in the heavenward way. God must needs discipline these people and rid them of their infirmities before they can enter in and possess the goodly land. So round and round they went, "compassing Edom," over the scorching sands and under the blazing suns. They were not able to enter in because of their unbelief. Their murmurings and idolatries kept them out. Now here they were again upon the border. They could climb the mountain and look over upon their inheritance. Behind them were the broad, barren stretches of the wilderness; before them, sweet fields all dressed in living green and rivers of delight. "To-morrow," they said, "we will cross the river." But that night King Arad with his barbaric hordes came out against them. They called upon God in their extremity and he made bare his arm in their behalf. Then burying their dead they set forth. But the roads were steep and rugged, and "they were discouraged because of the way." Their women and

children were worn out, and wearily trudging along the difficult paths they fell again into their besetting sin and began to murmur, "Why have ye brought us up hither?" They loathed their blessings and reproached God. What could be done with this stiff-necked people? This was their twelfth murmuring; it must be punished. The fiery serpents came, crawling from the coppices, hissing along the paths, stinging with their venomous fangs. Cries of anguish were heard everywhere. Multitudes were sick unto death. Then Moses in answer to his intercessory supplication was bidden to raise the brazen effigy upon a pole in the midst of the encampment; and the proclamation was issued, "Look and live."

Do you believe the story? Our Lord evidently believed it and wished Nicodemus to believe it. But then it must be remembered that He was not as familiar with the facts of Scripture as some of our modern wise men. We have been recently told that we must not be surprised to find limitations put upon the knowledge of Christ. This is going a step farther than to deny the inerrancy of the Scriptures. But whatever our learned critics may think, it is plain that Jesus accepted the truth of the old narrative, and the Church universal, despite the caveat of irreverent criticism, yields a cordial assent to it. "These things," says Paul, "happened unto our fathers for types." (1 Cor. 10: 11, margin.) There must, therefore, be helpful suggestions here for us.

I. Our first lesson is about *sin*. Sin is virus. The tempter is "that old serpent." In his first approach to the human race he came in serpentine form. And his influence was deadly as a serpent's fang. Sin courses through our blood like venom—from heart to brain, to feet, to finger-tips. The sinner is poisoned through and through. The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. Isa. 1: 5.

There is no cure in our *materia medica* for the serpent's bite. In vain did the Israelites search for an antidote. Their herbs and nostrums and incantations were in vain. The world has been groping through the ages for some remedy for sin. Mythology and philosophy are but tokens of the vain quest. Here is the problem: What shall I do to be saved? How shall God be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly? Or how shall a man be just with God?

Sin is mortal. The deadliest thing in the world is a cobra's bite. The eye of the victim grows dull and glassy, his flesh cold and blue to his fingers; in an hour his body is laid out for its burial. We cannot separate sin from its penalty. Sin is death. The soul that sinneth it shall die.

II. Our second lesson is of *the Saviour*. Here is a striking similitude.

(1.) The brazen effigy for the healing of the Israelites was in the likeness of their malady. A tablet might have been raised upon the pole with the name "Adonai" upon it. Would not that have answered just as well? No, it must be a brazen serpent, for it is intended to prefigure that Christ who must assume the form of sinful flesh in order to deliver the world from sin. As it is written, "He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him." And again, "He hath redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us; as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." And again, "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

(2.) But while this effigy was made in the similitude of



a serpent, there was no venom in it. Of all the vipers that crept and hissed throughout the camp, there was not one that did not have poison under its tongue. This serpent alone was harmless. In like manner Christ, who assumed a sinful form and came for our deliverance, was "holy, harmless, and undefiled," the only sinless man on earth. "There was no guile in his lips." Who shall lay anything to his charge? "I find no fault in him at all."

(3.) But that harmless effigy had power, like a mad-stone, to draw the virus from every wound. Our Lord upon his cross has a like power to save. Our sin is laid by imputation upon him, that he in turn may cast about us, by the imputation of his righteousness, a garment of fine linen, clean and white. He is the sinless One; and yet, hanging yonder as our substitute before the offended law, he becomes in our behalf the very chief of sinners. The world's burden is laid upon him. He assumes the curse of the race. The blood upon his brow seems like a frontlet bearing this word, "Accursed!" The priests and Pharisees passing by wagged their heads and cried, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree!" The earth, rumbling in the deep darkness, utters forth his doom, "Accursed!" His own anguished cry, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*" betrays his conviction that the curse of the perishing multitude is rolled upon him. It is by virtue of this imputation that he, being made in the likeness of sin, can draw the venom from the world's mortal wound. "He bare our sins—bare them and bare them away—in his own body on the tree."

III. *The Great Salvation.* "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

This "lifting up" meant death. So the Jews always understood it. Only by the death of Jesus could he give us entrance into life. His blood cleanseth. In an assem-

bly of so-called "Liberal Christians" the question arose, "Why is it that all the evangelical bodies of believers are making rapid and manifest progress while we alone go backwards?" Various answers were given. At length one of the delegates was moved to say, "Brethren, we must not expect to receive great accessions from among the people so long as we reject the doctrine of the blood. We have no blood in our religion." A most notable and significant confession. No blood in their religion! God help them then, and God pity their followers; for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

It is because our Lord was thus "lifted up" on his cross, tasting death for every man, that salvation can be offered to all. Christ's life, death, and resurrection are for all. He is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. By his atoning work every sinner is brought within the charmed circle of a possible salvation. Not that all are saved. Would to God they were! But all are made salvable. The responsibility of life or death is thrown upon them. There is none that cannot be saved. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

The sole condition affixed to eternal life is belief in Christ. "He that believeth shall be saved." Only believe! Look and live! No doubt there were many in Israel who, notwithstanding the proffer of life, perished and were buried in the desert sand. There were some who put their dependence upon such human help as was at their command; and they died. There were some who said, "We are likely to recover in any case; there is no need of alarm;" and they died. There were some who could not understand how there was healing power in a

brazen serpent on a pole : " It is mere superstition, and we decline to have anything to do with it ;" and they died. There were some who had passed the stage of anguish and were in torpor when bidden to look ; they were comfortable and did not wish to be disturbed ; and they died. But others, multitudes of others, hearing the invitation, looked towards the brazen effigy and lived. There are hundreds on hundreds of excuses that may be offered by the unbeliever for refusing to believe in Christ ; but they all mean rejection ; and his is the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. " He that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved ; he that believeth not shall be damned." He shall die in his sins as certainly as the serpent-bitten in the wilderness who would not look and live.

Faith is a simple thing, but it is " the coupling of destiny ;" it links the soul with the mercy of God. There is a legend of Bishop Forannau that, fleeing from his enemies, he with twelve companions came to the seashore. There, being at their wits' end, they found two flotsam logs. These they pushed out upon the waves and cast themselves upon them. The logs formed themselves into the shape of a cross and were borne away by favorable winds to the Flemish shore. Thus Forannau and his twelve were saved. The fable teaches that no man ever yet trusted himself to the cross and was not saved. No man ever looked to Jesus and died in his sins.

" Look ! look ! look and live !  
There is life for a look at the Crucified One,  
There is life at this moment for thee."

## JESUS AT JACOB'S WELL.

JOHN 4 : 9-26.

NOT far from the ruins of Shechem is pointed out an ancient well which the natives call *Bir Jacoub*. The water from its depths is clear as crystal. There is scarcely a doubt as to its identity with that "Jacob's well" where-at our Redeemer slaked his thirst. Few places are so fraught with sacred memories. It was here that Jacob "vanquished the Amorite with sword and bow." It was here that the bones of Joseph were laid to rest after their long wanderings. It was over this "parcel of ground" that the curses of Ebal and the blessings of Gerizim rang back and forth. Yonder still are the enduring mountains, and here the desolate ruins among the drifting sands, to attest the unchangeableness of God's word. It was here that Rehoboam gave his people the churlish answer that tore asunder his kingdom and called the Assyrian hosts like eagles to their prey. And here, on this crumbling curb, sat Jesus, "wearied with his journey," it being about the sixth hour of the day. "That weariness," says Trench, "so soon to be the refreshment of one, should in due time be the refreshment of all."

The word "thus" is significant. We have not a High-priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. For the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. He was no ascetic Christ, living apart from his fellows. He was no docetic Christ, walking like a spectre among them. Thirst and hunger, pain, sorrow, and disappointment, he knew them all. How grateful is his friendship when we are weary with the heat and burden

of toilsome days! How comforting to find him here at Sychar, a wayfaring man, with dust of travel on his garments, weary as we grow weary, thirsty as we are oftentimes athirst, sitting "thus" on the well!

But, with him, to rest was not to be idle. His leisure hours, among the groves of Olivet or by the lake-shore, or wherever he might be, were filled with labor of love. He had come from heaven to seek the lost.

"Out in the desert he heard their cry,  
Feeble and helpless and ready to die;"

and how was his soul straitened until he should find them and restore them to the Father's love! Not an hour of his precious life was wasted. "He spared not himself." He was ever about his Father's business. Sitting on this well-curb, worn out and athirst, he was still seeking the lost.

"Then cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water; and Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink." She came, balancing her pitcher on her head, as unconcerned as mortals often are in the momentous hours, not dreaming that this dusty traveller, who rose to proffer his humble request, was laying a beneficent snare for her soul.

How fortunate the chance, the seeming chance, that brought her there just then! An hour earlier or later she might have filled her pitcher as usual and gone. On such mere happenings and coincidences hang the eternal issues of our lives. Accidents they seem. Ah, no! "The accidents of men are the agents of God." The lot is indeed cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. Trifles are frequently the turning-points of destiny. "The finger of Providence was on me," wrote Wellington in one of his brief despatches from Waterloo. The finger of Providence is always upon us.

For aught I know the next lifting of my hand may set in motion influences reaching through all the ages. All lives and all the events of life are important. It would be as undivine for God to ignore an infant's cry as to sleep through the travail pangs of a nation. All things are included in his eternal and far-reaching plan. Christ foresaw the coming of this woman to Jacob's well at the sixth hour of that particular day, and "he must needs go through Samaria" to meet her.

In the conversation of Jesus with this woman we have a noteworthy instance of his mode of procedure in winning souls. Observe how wisely he approaches his task, how skillfully and cautiously he led this woman from the contemplation of lower things into the province of spiritual truth. He knew she was a sinner, as the sequel shows, being familiar with "all that ever she did," yet for a while how carefully he avoided all reference to it! He was master of "the art of putting things."

1. He "saith unto her, Give me to drink." When John Knox had a similar case in hand at Holyrood, he began, "O Mary, full of blood and lewdness!" But Jesus had use for the snare rather than the bludgeon. Lest he should alarm this precious, guilty, timid soul, he made his approach by a circuitous route. His first word was a request, wherein his use of the aspirate betrayed his Jewish origin. "Teni lishekoth" were his words. A Samaritan would have said, "Teni lisikoth."

2. The woman's attention was at once engaged: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a Samaritan?" Her countrymen were regarded as aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. They worshipped on Mount Gerizim. The Jews regarded them as apostates and had no dealings with them.

3. Jesus, waiving her inquiry, draws nearer the matter in hand. He provokes her curiosity as to himself: "If thou knewest who it is that asketh thee," and speaks enigmatically of "the gift of God," and again, of "living water." She was equally ignorant of both. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ;" and the living water is indeed the same. But these were mysteries to her.

4. Her interest is now thoroughly engaged. "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Whence then hast thou that 'living water?'" Her thoughts are still moving in the region of her material needs.

5. Nearer still the Master comes to his great purpose: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."

6. A suspicion of his meaning breaks dimly on the woman's mind. She answers half seriously, half lightly, "Sir, give me of this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."

7. Having thus touched her spiritual apprehension the Master shoots an arrow straight at the mark: "Go, call thy husband." Her attempts at evasion were vain. He was acquainted with her sin and shame. He lifted the veil and laid bare the dark secret of her life.

8. She endeavors to parry the thrust by changing the subject. "Our fathers worshipped God in Mount Gerizim; the Jews say that Jerusalem is the place of worship: what sayest thou?" Many another soul, under conviction of conscience, has sought escape in theological speculation.

9. With a brief but deft reference to her question Jesus leads on to a practical consideration of religion: the true worship of the living God. For "he is a Spirit, and, whether in Gerizim or at Jerusalem, they that worship him must draw near in true devotion and holy life."

10. The woman at length betrays her spiritual longing. The words of Jesus have touched her heart and conscience. She finds relief in the hope that Messiah will come and clear up all spiritual doubts, and answer the deep longings of the soul.

11. Then the supreme word is uttered, "I that speak unto thee am he!" It was a blessed revelation. There is reason to believe that this woman of Samaria found in the personal unveiling of Jesus the satisfying of her spiritual need. In drinking of the fountain of his love she possessed herself of that eternal life which is the gift of God.

"If thou knewest the gift of God!" What discoveries of untold joy and peace are suggested in those words. As the sands of the seashore for multitude so are God's gifts; but here is one that is exalted above all and called, by eminence, "the Gift of God." What is it? Christ himself. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." The benefits of his beneficent life and vicarious death are the richest of heaven's bounties. His friendship is the fountain that makes glad all the waste places of our life. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!

The soul that drinks but once from the wells in the King's garden must evermore come thither to renew its strength. Nothing else can satisfy. Christ holds an undivided sway or none. He stands beside our forgiven sins and slain passions, like Jehu by the piled-up heads of the seventy princes, saying, "Henceforth I do reign and



there is none beside me." In the prayer "Thy kingdom come" we ask our Lord to dethrone all selfishness and hold an undisputed power within us. The love that satisfies expels all other loves. Goodness has a vast expulsive power. Sunshine deadens the fire on the hearth. To earthly wells the multitude will come and come again until they have found the living water. Does the drunkard forsake his wine because it biteth like a serpent? Does the libertine forsake his mistress because he is reminded that her feet take hold on hell? Or does the miser throw away his wealth because he knows it is mere dust and filthy dross? No, never; never until they learn of something better than wine and sensuality and gold. Men go on drinking of the waters of Sychar until Messiah comes their way and points out the life-giving river that flows from beneath the throne of God.

This rolling flood, murmuring ever, "Drink and live! Drink and live!" follows us through all our wanderings, like the stream that burst from the rock and accompanied Israel, which the blazing suns could not dry nor the hot sands bury. God's grace in Jesus Christ flows on for ever, broadening and deepening like that river of prophecy whose "waters go out from Jerusalem, half toward the former sea and half toward the hinder sea, abiding in summer and in winter." Thus does the saving stream of heavenly mercy pursue its course from the Paradise below to the Paradise above, gladdening the parched lips of the redeemed multitude all along the way.

## JESUS AT NAZARETH.

LUKE 4. 16-30.

THE return of Jesus to "Nazareth, where he had been brought up," was doubtless an event of extraordinary interest to the village gossips. His former life among them had commanded their respect, yet it must have been a constant reproach to their ungodly ways. He was probably at no time popular among his fellow townsmen. There is no love lost between light and darkness. It is an old story how an enemy of Aristides the Just on being asked, "Is he not just?" answered, "Aye, and for that I hate him." No doubt there were those in Nazareth who derided the virtue of the young Carpenter as mere sanctimoniousness. His return at this time, however, must have created a sensation among them.

A few months previously he had closed his shop and left the village. Since then strange things had happened. He had been baptized by John the Baptist, and gathering a group of devoted followers had gone about preaching and performing wonderful works. He had made his appearance in the temple at the time of the Passover, and, assuming a divine authority, single-handed, and without resistance, had driven out the traffickers and money-changers. Up in Samaria they were greatly excited about him. All sorts of rumors as to his superhuman works and discourses were in the air. He had gone away from Nazareth an unknown artisan; he returned with the name and applause of a prophet. The people of the town must therefore have been moved with curiosity respecting him.

On the morning of the Sabbath after his return he went into the Synagogue "as his custom was." There are those who belittle the need of attendance on the sanctuary, holding it possible to live devoutly without it. To abide at home on the Sabbath or to saunter in the fields is worship enough for them. But Jesus was an habitual church-goer. He anticipated the injunction "Neglect not the assembling of yourselves together," believing that in so doing he honored both God and the goodly fellowship.

The synagogue was a plain structure with a pulpit or platform at the further end. Near by was a wooden chest in which were kept the sacred scrolls, a memorial of the last Ark of the Covenant. The men sat on one side of the room and the women on the other. In worshipping all turned their faces toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10). The proceedings were conducted by the "Master of the Synagogue" who was waited upon by a "minister;" the priests and Levites having no part in the synagogue service. In the reading and exposition of the set lessons from Scripture, one from the Law and the other from the Prophets, it was customary to call upon any who were present, particularly strangers, to take part. The speaker stood while reading from the Scripture and sat while commenting upon it.

The interest, on this occasion, reached its height when Jesus, in answer to the customary invitation, "stood up for to read." The first lesson of the day had already been recited; the second was in the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah. The roll being placed by the minister in the hands of Jesus he unfolded it to the proper place and read: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance*

*to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."* Having read thus far he sat down to comment upon the truth, "and the eyes of all that were in the synagogue were fastened upon him."

The sum and substance of his discourse is given in the words, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." That is, he presented himself as the fulfillment of that Messianic prediction. This was, indeed, the first formal and public announcement of his Messiahship; and it was meet and proper that it should be made at Nazareth among his own townsmen. The place of our upbringing has a special claim upon us. It is indeed easier to deal with strangers. For some reason we are exceedingly reluctant to speak with those of our own households respecting the great things that most vitally concern us. It must have been a severe trial to Jesus to unfold his stupendous claims and ambitious purposes to those who had known him from his childhood up. But he loved them, notwithstanding their notorious fame, and would give them the first opportunity of espousing his cause and rallying around him.

We could wish, if only for its homiletical value as an example of expository preaching, that this discourse might have been given in full. As it is, some things are clear:

1. It was a Bible sermon. Our Lord honored the Scriptures. They were the guide of his youth. He doubtless committed them to memory in the rabbinical school. He received them in good faith as the infallible rule of faith and practice. To him they were true. Had he supposed that they were not to be depended upon, from beginning to end, in all honesty he must have told us so. Those portions of the early history of Israel which are

called in question sometimes nowadays were never doubted by this biblical Expert. Let others speak slightly and jocosely of such narratives as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by heavenly fire, the turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, and Jonah swallowed by the great fish; this Teacher of truth and righteousness referred to them in reverent terms. If they are "fables" he did not know it, else surely he would not have left us to believe a lie. In no single word or syllable does he encourage us to turn aside from the absolute faithfulness of holy writ. He loved the Bible, believed it, made it his weapon of defense in the temptation of the wilderness, found his credentials within its pages, adventured his cause and success upon the accuracy of its prophecies, preached from it, lived by it, and commended it to his followers as the great fountain of authority in spiritual matters, saying, "Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they which testify of me."

2. This discourse of Jesus was about himself. He is indeed the subject, center and objective point of all true preaching. There are three things which all need to know. The *first* is God. There is no full revelation of God anywhere save in Jesus Christ. Nature gives us incomplete and unsatisfying glimpses of him. Conscience speaks of him as a consuming fire. But in Christ all his attributes are unveiled; his justice, love, wisdom, power, holiness, truth, infinitude. He is the fulness of the God-head bodily. No man has ever formed a true conception of God except in beholding his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. The *second* thing we need to understand is man: his noble birth, the possibilities of his being, his sublime destiny. Christ was the ideal Man, called by eminence "the Son of man." In him we mark the fulfil-

ment of all human capabilities. His work was duty; his life was character. In observing him we are convinced of our own sins and shortcomings; for in him we behold what a man ought to be. And the *third* and most vital matter of universal interest is touching the reconciliation of sinful man and an offended God. In Christ the great reconciliation is made known. His death delivers us from the shame and remorse of a mislived past; his life is the pattern of all holy living. Faith in Christ crucified is the secret of salvation; imitation of Christ is the secret of sanctification; that is, growth in character unto the full stature of a man.

To preach Christ, therefore, is to answer all spiritual inquiry and supply all human need. In him ye are complete. He preached himself because the people of Nazareth and all the world were dying for want of him. We can preach nothing else. The Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ—Christ crucified—the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1: 20-24).

3. In this discourse at Nazareth our Lord proclaimed good tidings to all sorts and conditions of men. (1) "I am come," he said, "to preach the gospel to the poor." Uhlhorn says: "The world before Christ was a world without love." The poor of those times were abjectly poor; and there were few to befriend them. Hunger and nakedness were their portion. But the heart of Jesus went out towards them. If he might not endow them with earthly comforts he could—which was better—gladden them with the hope of a spiritual inheritance and open to them the promise of an endless life. (2) "I am come," he continued, "to heal the broken-hearted." Hearts are breaking everywhere: the world is full of

death and sorrow. Alas for those who cannot look to Jesus when home is draped in the trappings of grief! His sympathy is as grateful as balm in the gloomy hour. He giveth beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. (3) "I preach deliverance to the captives." Sin is bondage; vice is an iron chain; habit is a prison door. An evil-doer is "holden with the cords of his sins." All attempt at self-release is vain, as vain as the beating of the wings of the captive dove. But the help of Christ is Omnipotence: "I can do all things through him which strengtheneth me." He breaketh the gates of brass and cutteth the bars of iron in sunder (Psalm 107: 10-16). (4) "I am come," said the Preacher, still in pursuance of Isaiah's prophecy, "to restore the sight of the blind." Physical blindness is a sore misfortune; to see no beauty in the world, to grope one's way in darkness. But moral blindness is worse; to see no beauty in truth and goodness, in love and duty and character. The great Physician who heard the cry of Bartimeus, "Oh, that I might receive my sight!" is able and ever ready to enlighten the darkness of the soul. (5) "I am come to set at liberty them that are bruised." Their name is legion—chafed with the fret and worry of life, torn by malice and misrepresentation, crushed under the harrow of adversity, bruised by conflicts and persecutions. Christ is the good Samaritan who comes to pour in wine and oil and bind up their wounds. (6) Once more, and best of all: "I am come to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." The fullness of time was at hand for the blossoming of all the hopes and promises which Israel had been watching through the centuries. The golden age of all history was now to begin, and continue in ever-increasing splendor until all

the poor should be enriched, all the broken-hearted healed, all the captives delivered, all the bruised set free, and until the glory of Messiah as the Lord should cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

It would seem as if all Nazareth should have rejoiced in a message so full of promise and helpfulness. But what happened? (1) They "wondered at his gracious words." (2) They began to say, "Is not this Joseph's son?" Thus wonder and admiration soon gave place to incredulity. Evil suggestions, like fowls of the air, devoured the good seed. (3) They questioned among themselves, "Why does he not perform some of his boasted miracles? Let him, if indeed he is the Messiah, show his credentials." It was in reply to this unspoken challenge that Jesus, having quoted the proverb, "Physician, heal thyself," met it with another: "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country." He would perform no miracle among them. He would reserve his sovereign right to work whenever and wheresoever he pleased; even as Elias wrought in Sarepta and Eliseus in Syria. (4) This reference to God's sovereign goodness among the Gentiles enraged the Nazarenes beyond measure. Their Jewish pride was touched. With one voice the congregation cried out against him. (5) They rushed upon him and dragged him out of the synagogue and through the streets of the town towards a precipice near by, intending to hurl him from it. Then a strange thing happened. There are those who think Jesus escaped by rendering himself invisible, or by smiting them with blindness. This, however, is unnecessary. It is probable that, as on other occasions, he overawed his enemies by his calm majesty, and so, "passing through the midst of them, went his way." With his going the hour of Naza-



reth's opportunity ceased. "Over the hills he passed in judicial separation from the misguided city."

The rejection of Christ when offered to the soul by the influence of the Holy Spirit is the unpardonable sin. The only door of escape is shut. "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." The root of this mortal offence is unbelief; and such as are most familiar with gospel privileges are especially prone to it. "Anear the kirk, afar frae God," is a true proverb. The Nazarenes had known Jesus from his earliest years, had seen his blameless life and spotless character; yet by this they were prejudiced against him. It is persons of noble gifts and broad culture who, through the workings of spiritual pride, are most liable to unbelief. And far better had they never heard of Jesus than, hearing, to reject him. "I would rather dwell," says Richter, "in the dim fog of superstition than in air rarefied to nothing by the air-pump of unbelief; in which the panting breast expires, vainly and convulsively gasping for breath." The gospel is presented at our very doors. The gift of everlasting life is to be had for the taking. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

## THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

LUKE 5:1-11.

OUR Lord, driven out of Nazareth, went about among the villages of Galilee, preaching and working miracles, until he came to Capernaum, on the northern shore of Lake Gennesaret. This now became the centre of his missionary work. All that remains of Capernaum to-day is a heap of desolate ruins known as Tel-Hum. At the time of our narrative it was famed for its fisheries. It was specially adapted to the needs of Jesus, being at once remote from opposition and within reach of multitudes of people. Wherefore it became known as "his own city."

The fame of the great Teacher had grown so rapidly that, being crowded out of the synagogues, he resorted to the open street, the market-places, the grassy hillsides, and the lake-shore. Few believed on him, the great majority cavilled, and still in vast numbers they thronged to hear him. This was probably due to the fact that, with great simplicity and an impressive air of authority, he "preached the word of God."

His purpose was to save the lost. Little he cared for the arts of rhetoric and oratory. Let others win renown as dialecticians or philosophers; with him all else was subordinated to a great passion for souls. He held himself to the preaching of God's word, because nothing else has saving power. Among the fishermen of Capernaum, busy with their nets and boats, he would be known as the Fisher of men. Thus the early fathers knew him. Clement, of Alexandria, in one of the oldest hymns extant, sings:

"Fisher of men, the blest,  
Out of the world's unrest,  
Out of sin's troubled sea,  
Taking us, Lord, to thee:  
Out of the waves of strife  
With bait of blissful life;  
Drawing thy nets to shore  
With choicest fish, good store."

In the story of the miraculous draught of fishes there are practical far-reaching lessons for all who sincerely desire to follow the Lord aright.

1. *The business of Christ is the business of his disciples.* "As the Father hath sent me into the world," he said, "so send I you." For what? To win souls. "Follow me," were his words, "and from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

One of the favorite monograms of the early Christians was the Greek word *ιχθυσ*, meaning a fish. Its letters form the initials of *Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτήρ*, that is, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour." The rudely carven fish found on many of the tombs of the catacombs is a pathetic reminder of those times of persecution when the sepulchre of a Christian would not have been secure from profanation had his faith been more openly inscribed upon it.

Julian the Apostate wrote contemptuously: "The Galilean did indeed most aptly term His apostles 'fishers,' for, as the fisherman draweth his victims from the waters, where they were free and happy, into an element in which they cannot breathe, so do they who make men Christians." It is observed, on the other hand, that the word selected by our Lord with a singular felicity excludes this idea. The word *σῶναι*, to catch, means *to take alive*, being used especially with reference to prison-

ers of war. Men taken in the gospel net are not destined to death, but to fullness of life. They are captured as "prisoners of hope" (Zech. 9 : 12).

2. *The power which ensures success in our vocation is wholly from God.* Had it not been for the personal interposition of Jesus the fishermen of Capernaum would have taken nothing. He knew where the spoil could be found; he knew how it could be taken. The miracle lay in Christ's superhuman knowledge rather than in the use of superhuman power. No doubt he, the creator and sustainer of every living thing, could have driven at will all the fish of Gennesaret to this single spot; but there were shoals in the neighborhood, and he knew just where. He does not interrupt the course of nature without a reason. He sits supreme amid "the hierarchy of laws," and can to a nicety accommodate all things to their operation. A miracle, indeed, is not a violation of law, but rather its adjustment to unusual needs. Did we but know it, God is controlling nature in his people's behalf all the while. Special providences are his work, and so are special helps in duty. Our work without them would be as vain as water poured upon the ground. Without him we can do nothing. All things are possible when we are compassed about by his strength. And he has promised those who go about his business never to leave them to themselves. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. And lo, I am with you alway." While spiritual fishermen are casting their nets he always stands upon the shore near by.

3. *All true servants of Christ are fishers of men.* Not one is exempt. To win souls is the work of the kingdom; and the work of the kingdom must be above all (Matt. 6 : 33). If the Lord had chosen he might doubt-

less have saved the world without us; but he has chosen otherwise. "Go ye," is his injunction, "and constrain them to come in." He holds himself responsible for results, but calls for human hands to cast the net. In this we are greatly exalted; for what honor could be beyond that of coöperation with God's only-begotten Son? Yet how many seemingly ignore or disregard it! How many seem to be exclusively occupied with their own salvation, as if that were all! Such may indeed be saved "so as by fire," but they fall short of the great honor and of the supreme joy. A lonely heaven awaits the believer who has lived for himself: the full inheritance, the freedom of the city, the milk and honey are for those who come saying, "Here, Lord, am I, and those whom thou hast given me."

4. *A true servant of Jesus must leave all to follow him.* That is, he must subordinate all worldly pursuits to the Lord's matters. "No man that warreth," said Paul to Timothy, "entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." The sons of Zebedee and Andrew and Peter left all to follow Christ. They had indeed but little to leave, a few boats and nets, but this little was their all. Nor had they ever reason to regret their choice. Long afterwards Peter was on a certain occasion moved to say, "Lo, we have left all and followed thee;" to which the Master answered, "There is none that hath left home or brethren or parents or wife or children for my sake and the gospel's who shall not receive manifold more in the present time and in the time to come life everlasting." The sense of right doing, the approval of a good conscience, is itself manifold more than all this world can give; and as to the life everlasting, ah! who shall paint its joys? "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of

man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

5. *The first rule of the service is obedience.* "At thy word we will let down the net." Our wisdom goes for nothing when the Master speaks. The first breath of the Christian life is in the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And thenceforth his nod and beck must be our supreme law. The moment our will crosses that of the Master we are in trouble. Saul, being commanded to destroy the Amalekites, root and branch, thought to please God by sparing the choicest of the sheep and oxen for his altar, but the reproof was quick and sharp: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15: 22). Nothing can compensate for wilful disobedience. God is Master; we are mere underlings. He knows best, and he is ever ready to make known his will. The mercy-seat is his oracle. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jas. 1: 5). Then to obey is all. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

6. *It is an art to catch men.* There were three ways of fishing: *first*, with a hook; *second*, with a hand-net let down wherever the keen eye detected the prey; and *third*, with a drag-net, requiring a company to manage it. But skill was necessary in any case. All day the fisherman used artifice; the cover of the night was sought to conceal his purpose. By as much as souls are of more value than fish by so much should the servants of Jesus be wiser and more eager than fishermen to take the spoil. The Master himself set the pattern in dealing with Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, the young ruler, the woman taken in adultery, the Pharisees, the hungry multi-

tude. He adjusted his methods to individual needs; now startling the soul by sudden revelations and again drawing near by careful and circuitous paths, now uttering woes that rang like thunderbolts and, anon, entreaties as sweet and alluring as a mother's lullaby. This is the art of the soul winner. "I am made all things to all men" wrote the apostle Paul, "that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9: 22).

7. *One secret of success is in cooperation.* At a critical point in their work Andrew and Simon found it necessary to "call their partners" in the other ship. The church is divided into many denominations, set off from one another by differences of creed and polity, but all one in fundamental matters of belief and in the supreme purpose. Each of these denominations is a boat-load of fishermen. It may be that the time will never come when their marks of difference will be wholly obliterated; but surely the time cometh, and now is, when they should work together in concord, as "partners" in a common work. "Ye be brethren," said the patriarch; "see that ye fall not out by the way." However we may be at odds in other matters, in the propagation of our common religion at home and abroad we should heartily coöperate. Friendliness is not enough; sympathy is not enough; coöperation is what we want. Let us call our partners, that we lose no precious souls in the drawing of the net.

8. *God's fishermen must never lose heart.* These boats had been cruising about all night on Gennesaret with nothing to show for it. Where is the faithful Christian who has not passed through periods of fruitless toil? For years the missionary Judson preached among the Karens with not a single soul for his hire. All seasons are not for harvest-home. Christ himself saw little of the

fruit of his labors. "He that believeth shall not make haste." Time tells. If God's glory is our sole desire what matters it whether the seed we sow ripens now or on our graves? Indeed, if there were no results, the work itself would be its compensation. "Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice."

9. *A change of plan is sometimes necessary to success.* These fishermen had been keeping too near shore.

"Cast after cast, by force or guile,  
All waters must be tried."

It is not an uncommon thing for a minister, failing in one parish, to succeed in another. The most skillful angler sometimes comes home with an empty basket because he used brown hackle when the trout would have risen to another sort of fly. A still fisher shifts his place as occasion requires. But in Christ's service whether we go or stay it must ever be at his word. "Launch out into the deep," said he. They had passed their years on Gennesaret: and what was he, bred to the trade of a carpenter, that he should advise them? "Nevertheless," they said, "at thy word we will let down the net." And out in the deep water they found the shoal. We are all too much given to inshore fishing. God honors great faith and large endeavor. Launch out—out farther into the deep! "Let us undertake great things for him and expect great things from him."

10. *Success is sure.* These toilers of Gennesaret were "astonished at the draught of fishes which they took." But why were they astonished? They should have expected it. The faithful fisherman, obedient and persistent, always fills his net. The faithful husbandman, going forth with weeping, bearing precious seed, always comes again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him.



The faithful soldier, armed *cap-a-pie* in God's whole armor and facing the foe without flinching, always returns laden with spoil. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. There is no possibility of failure. Nets full, garners full, treasuries full, these are the sure reward.

Of all in the little boat Peter was most impressed by this miracle. It gave him a momentary glimpse of the omniscience and omnipotence of Jesus. In the sudden light he saw himself revealed, a sinner at an infinite remove from this divine One. He was horrified, fear-stricken. If God and truth and heaven were suddenly to burst upon us we should all be stupefied. "Woe is me," cried Isaiah, to whom the Lord had unveiled himself, "for I am a man of unclean lips, and mine eyes have seen the King!" He saw the mighty gulf of separation. "Depart from me," cried Peter, "for I am a sinful man!" But the Lord did not depart. He drew this faithful servant nearer and nearer to himself. And the time came when Peter's all-consuming prayer was not "Depart!" but "Abide with me." The time came when, in faithful and devoted service, he knew the full meaning of this mighty draught of fishes. A multitude were assembled at Pentecost in a certain place when the Spirit of God descended upon them in power; and they began with one consent to cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter stood forth and declared among them the unsearchable riches of Christ. He and his fellow-apostles launched out into the deep and let down their nets. "And, lo! the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Were they astonished again? Why should they be? The Lord's promise is the complement of his plan. Launch out, launch out, O faithful fishermen, and let down your nets!

## A SABBATH IN CAPERNAUM.

MARK I:21-34.

A SINGLE day in the story of Jesus will furnish the key of his entire life. The Sabbath in Capernaum to which our thought turns was a perfect day. In the morning he attended the synagogue, thence he betook himself to the home of Simon, and at eventide he healed the sick who were laid before him in the open street. All through the day his gracious power shone forth; it was meet that it should be rounded out with labor of love. Worship, home-life and sweet service of charity; in these the Lord of the Sabbath set forth how the Sabbath was made for man.

The lesson of that day in brief was *authority*. The work of the Master could avail but little until his credentials were verified. It was not enough that he claimed authority; he must show himself with power to be the very Son of God. This he did with threefold emphasis: by his doctrine, his conquest of the evil one, and his compassion for the children of men.

I. His "doctrine;" that is, the subject-matter and manner of his teaching. It is written that those who heard him in the synagogue "were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The scribes were masters in Israel. It was their special business to know and teach the oracles. They were biblical experts; their years of preparation were passed in the study of theology and dialectics. Yet, by common consent, they were outdone by this Nazarene

Carpenter, unlettered and untrained. In every particular he surpassed them.

1. In the nature of the truths which he proclaimed. The scribes were great in their mastery of small things. They discoursed on mint, anise and cummin to the neglect of weightier matters. They could advise precisely as to the length of a Sabbath-day's journey or the amount of water to be used in ceremonial ablutions, but as to "judgment, mercy and faith" they were quite at sea (Matt. 23:23). Jesus, on the contrary, dwelt upon those sublime verities which have to do with spiritual life. He boldly confronted the great problems which concern eternal destiny and solved them all. God, duty, sin and retribution, pardon, heaven and hell, such were the themes of his discourse. And this was why the people thronged to hear him. They were weary of trivial generalities. They knew themselves to be sinners and were troubled with a certain fearful looking for of judgment. Deep down in their hearts was a longing for salvation. To entertain them, under such conditions, with elaborate disquisitions on almond knops and the just proportions of frankincense was sacred trifling. These scribes were as false to their responsibility as the Emperor Nero was when, during a sore famine, he busied himself in bringing sand from the seashore for the gladiatorial games. The multitudes were in earnest, but their religious teachers were not. The people wanted bread; the scribes gave them a stone. Then came Jesus; he came to bear witness of the truth. Great was the contrast. Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword, the sword of the Spirit. By it the people's hearts were pierced; in the light of its flashing they saw both hell and heaven opened; on the hand that wielded it they saw the signet-ring of

Jehovah. Never had they heard such teaching; never had they been so cast down, so lifted up, by the power of truth. Verily here was a teacher who had been in the trying place with God.

2. He surpassed the scribes, moreover, in his method of imparting truth. They were adepts in the art of hair-splitting. Fine-spun theories were their forte; he proceeded along the broad lines of principle. They could "divide betwixt the north and northwest side;" he led his hearers along the verge of the abyss that separates death from life. The key to his doctrine is "the kingdom of God;" a kingdom of truth and righteousness to be set up on earth; a kingdom above us, about us, within us. To reach that kingdom and take others with us is the chief end of man. The highway is as old as the heavenly grace, as plain as the sun at noonday. The scribes who should have led the people over it with their eyes uplifted were employed in gathering crystals and botanizing along the way. Jesus cried: "Come! Sin is death and righteousness is life. To believe in God's grace and serve him with an undivided heart is best of all. The things of this present world are shadows; God and truth are real and eternal. Heaven is just yonder. Follow me and reach it!"

3. The teaching of Christ was also characterized by simplicity. He led his hearers by a plain path through the realm of mystery. Our books on theology are proverbially of little interest to the average reader, because of their interminable prolixity and oppressive profundity. The opinion seems to prevail that a didactic theologian must needs express himself in a dull, vague, learned way. So thought the scribes, and they taught accordingly. But the method of Jesus was simplicity itself. In schools

of theology the nature of God is set forth in arguments known as "ontological," "cosmological," "teleological;" but Jesus was hampered in no such way. He made his meaning clear with illustrations borrowed from the air, the fields, the mountains. He spoke in earnest, pleading, hopeful words which all could understand; not "as a dying man to dying men," but rather as a living man to living men. He affected no superior learning, coveted no fame as a philosopher. His sole purpose was to set up the kingdom and allure people into it. Wherefore his vocabulary was that of the masses and his logic was within the reach of all. "Whosoever," said he, "shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in, no wise enter therein."

4. An important feature of Christ's teaching was its appeal to personal acceptance. He did not present truth for the truth's sake only, but for its value as a possession in fee simple. He pressed it home upon the individual hearer as having the power of life. He was ever saying, "Eat, drink, receive, believe, enter in, possess, be rich towards God." It is one thing to accept a doctrine as an objective truth, and quite another to appropriate it and make it a living part of our daily life. Luther, who said that the essence of the Christian religion was in its possessive pronouns, was once found bowed in tears under a crucifix, murmuring, "For me! For me!" We cannot know the gospel until we thus apprehend our personal relation to it. This was our Lord's meaning when he said, "Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you." The truth must be eaten, digested, assimilated, made to enter into our very veins and marrow, before we can get the real good of it.

5. It was, however, the air of authority in the teach-

ing of Jesus that most impressed the people of Capernaum. The scribes made little of their own opinions, laying much stress on precedent, the sentences of old-time rabbis, and the interpretations of the schools. But Jesus arrogated to himself an infallible knowledge of truth. The rabbis and the philosophic schools were nothing to him. His word was, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." If he referred to the traditions of the elders it was to denounce them: "Ye have heard how it was said by them of old time, so and so; but I say unto you." Thus he set himself against all schools and authorities as sole arbiter of truth. Nay, he did not hesitate to speak of himself as truth's source and fountain: "I am the truth;" "I am the light of the world;" "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." All this would be in the last extreme absurd and preposterous had he not intended to claim supreme dignity and authority as the veritable Son of God.

II. We turn now to our Lord's conquest of the evil one. Here also we shall find convincing tokens of his authority as the only-begotten of the Father and the Saviour of men.

1. It is not possible to believe the Scriptures and disbelieve the personality of Satan. He is represented everywhere in Holy Writ as a spirit of evil, "going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it."

2. Satan was moved to special activity at the time of Christ's advent. It was known, doubtless, in the regions of darkness that Jesus was come "to destroy the works of the devil." The prince of this world was not disposed to let his kingdom slip from him without a desperate effort to retain it. For this reason it is represented that among the lost spirits there was unusual commotion at this time:

"Hasten, hasten,  
From its station drag the ponderous  
Cross of iron that to mock us  
Is suspended high in air!"

3. Demoniacal possession, so called, was one of the results of this extraordinary activity. Wherever the door of a human heart was left open an evil spirit entered. This phenomenon cannot be explained away as lunacy, or any form of physical disease. The dual personality of the demoniac shows that it was a real possession. The afflicted man of Gadara came running to Jesus, but the demon within him cried out, "Depart from me!" The demoniac of Capernaum would seem to have been a decorous worshipper until Jesus entered the synagogue. Then at once the evil spirit in the man began to make an outcry. He betrayed his acquaintance with the divine nature of Jesus, saying, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." For him the coming of this Holy One meant only shame and torture and utter discomfiture. Thus the demons were ever crying out against him, in frenzied words entreating him to depart and torment them not.

4. Over these spirits of evil our Lord had absolute power. Never once did he fail to cast them out. They might rage, and torture their victims in the going, but go they must. It was this power over the legions of the infernal world that most astonished the people. The ill-disposed charged him with "casting out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils." The better-minded said: "What manner of man is this? For with power he commandeth the unclean spirits and they come out!"

III. Our Lord supported his divine authority still further by the healing of the sick. In Peter's home a

dear one lay sick of a fever; "he took her by the hand and lifted her up and the fever left her." How brief the record! but between the lines are long chapters of pain and delirium and sleepless nights and prayerful solicitude. "And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased; and all the city was gathered together at his door." What a motley multitude was there: the blind, palsied, crippled, consumptive; some limping on crutches, others borne on pallets, little children wailing in their mothers' arms. Never was such a free dispensary as that. And never before, or since, in all the world was another such physician. Two blessed things are said of him. *First*, he had compassion. The word compassion suggests a partnership in pain. He suffered with them; as it is written, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." And, *second*, he had power to heal. He knew no desperate nor incurable cases. No doubt among those who presented themselves were some whom other physicians had given up. The cold hand of the King of Terrors was upon them. A word, and they were healed. To the blind he said, "Receive thy sight," to the paralytic, "Be whole." Pale-faced children ceased their wailing when he touched them. And all Capernaum was glad that eventide because the spectres of pain and sorrow had been driven out.

The Good Physician walks among us still, the same compassionate Healer and Comforter yesterday, to-day and for ever.

"The healing of the seamless dress  
Is by our beds of pain;  
We touch him in life's throng and press,  
And we are whole again."

Wherefore let us sing with heart and understanding,



"Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."

It would appear that the people of Capernaum—among whom Jesus showed his divine authority by his doctrine, his mastery of Satan, and his power to heal diseases—should have been grateful and godly above all their neighbors. Alas! the human heart is not only desperately wicked but strangely stubborn in its unbelief. These people, among whom Jesus exemplified all truth and righteousness, rejected his Messianic claims and continued in their sins; insomuch that he was moved to cry, "Woe unto thee, Capernaum; exalted unto heaven, thou shalt be brought down unto hell!" A shapeless ruin, the hiding-place of owls and bitterns, attests the truth of that solemn admonition. Privilege and responsibility go hand in hand. Those who have known the gospel and seen its power will live or die according to their treatment of it. But, whatever our attitude may be, the multitudes are more and more receiving Christ. The world is being convinced of his authority. The time draws near when the nations shall come flowing to him, as the throng gathered about his door in Capernaum at eventide. And he will heal their diseases, bind up their broken hearts and wipe away all tears. Then shall he reign, in goodness and mercy, from the river even unto the ends of the earth.

## THE PARALYTIC HEALED.

MARK 2 : 1-12.

THE story is a simple one ; its parts and persons are quite commonplace. A sick man, helpless, hopeless, all day wishing for the night, all night praying for the morning—you may meet with him anywhere. And sympathizing friends, watching the sad progress of his malady, at their wits' end to devise relief—bless God ! they too are everywhere ; the world is full of kind hearts. And physicians, coming to the bedside to count the patient's pulse, consulting, shaking their wise heads because they know that the King of Terrors is feeling his way towards the centers of life—there are throngs of them, earnest and skillful to alleviate pain and restore the languishing, but oh, so feeble to contend with that grim presence ! And the Great Physician, mightier than Death, knowing no "desperate cases," with life in his glance and health in his gentle touch—he too is abroad in the earth, his quick ear catching every groan and prayer, his strong hand snatching the spoil from the oppressor ; lo ! he is with us always. And the cavillers, sitting by and reasoning in their hearts, doubting the power of man's faith and God's love and all things between—there is never, alas ! a lack of such kill-joys. And the people about the door, inadvertently blocking the way of life and pardon, wondering, wanting to help, eager to see, amazed—we are the people. And, old as the story of Christ's mercy is, we ever deem it a miracle. "And they said, 'We never saw it on this fashion !'" Yet it was the old, old fashion. The thing is

always happening. Up and down the world, along the ways of pain and suffering and death, walks this Jesus of Nazareth :

“We may not climb the heavenly steeps  
To bring the the Lord Christ down ;  
In vain we search the lowest deeps,  
For him no depths can drown ;  
But warm, sweet, tender, even yet  
A present help is he ;  
And faith has yet its Olivet,  
And love its Galilee.”

And the healed one—sins and palsy gone together—not an hour passes but that, somewhere on earth, he rises, takes up his bed and walks. A great multitude, thus healed and saved with a glorious salvation, are passing through the crowd, singing and making melody in their hearts on the way to the Father's house.

We turn now to a more particular study of this healing at Capernaum, its details and *dramatis personæ*.

1. *The paralytic*. In oriental countries palsy often assumes an aggravated form which adds to utter prostration an intolerable pain. In this instance it would appear that the disease was probably due to pernicious habits. Whatever the pangs of this sufferer, sharper than all was the memory of a mislived past. The museum of any medical school will bear witness that “the bones of the wicked are full of the sins of their youth.” All disease is more or less remotely the result of ill doing. Every violation of law, physical or moral, leaves its mark on body as well as soul. Sin persistently indulged in reddens the eyes, plows furrows in the brow, ruins the complexion, weakens the nerves, racks the joints, disturbs digestion, pollutes the blood, confuses the brain, thickens the speech,

and sows throughout the entire system the seeds of swift decay and dissolution. Vice is a bad venture even if eternity be left out of the reckoning. But eternity can not be left out. Some sins go with daggers in their girdles, to kill at sight; others lie in ambush for the future. This paralytic, bound in the afflictions of his physical malady and the dread of approaching death, was fretted and tortured most of all by an apprehension of what comes after death. "After death, the Judgment!" His sins sat heavy on his soul. Who was there that could minister to a mind diseased? Remorse is more incurable than palsy. He should have thought of this before. But self-indulgence is the most exacting of all businesses. Pleasure is a jealous mistress. One love is all that life allows. Therefore the wisest of men, who had drained earth's cups of joy and thirsted still, was moved to utter this grave admonition: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes: *but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*" This paralytic of Capernaum had come at length to realize, in body and soul, the folly of wrong living. His case seemed a desperate one.

2. *His friend, affliction.* The philosophy of this case centers in the ministry of pain. If our surmise as to his former manner of life is true, then it was a most gracious providence which laid the man upon his back and forced him to look up. It may have come in some carousal: into the midst of the merry-making stalked this grim-visaged friend and smote him, smote him as with a bludgeon, and left him prone and helpless. Comrades gathered about him, loosened his tunic, felt above his heart, whispered their dread, and carried him home to be

thenceforth a bedridden sufferer. But this was, indeed, the most fortunate thing that ever befell him. It forced him into the solitude and made him think. It obliged him to confront his sin and danger. Thus it is written : "No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous ; but in the end it worketh the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

"Pain's furnace heat within me quivers,  
God's breath upon the fire doth blow,  
And all my heart within me shivers  
And trembles in the fiery glow ;  
He comes and lays my heart, all heated,  
On the bare anvil, minded so  
Into his own fair shape to beat it,  
With his great hammer, blow on blow ;  
And yet I whisper 'As God will,'  
And at his heaviest blows hold still."

It is an old saying : "He who would have friends must show himself friendly." How are we treating our afflictions ; as foes or friends ? Let us not be angry with our pains and sorrows, but rather suffer them to work their perfect work in us. John Milton, delighting himself in the pleasures of court life and the composition of light verse, might never have written his great epic but for the visitation of blindness. Not until his outward eyes were closed did his great soul mount aloft to gaze undazzled on the glories of heaven. "Paradise Lost" is a tribute to the beneficence of affliction. Paul's thorn in the flesh made him partaker of God's grace. This paralytic would in all likelihood have passed his life in obliviousness of spiritual things had not this friendly palsy brought him to the great Healer.

"Blest be the sorrow, kind the storm,  
Which drives us nearer home."

3. *Enter, four neighbors.* They came to help the sufferer. They had heard how Jesus of Nazareth, going about among the villages of Galilee, had wrought many wonderful cures. He had now returned to Capernaum and was preaching in a certain house near by. They said to one another, "Here is a forlorn hope: the man is sinking from day to day: everything else has failed, why not carry him to Jesus? Something might come of it; surely it would do no harm to try." They consulted the patient; poor fellow, he could only answer with his eyes, but his eyes said, "Yes; it's the last hope; he's a great healer; take me!" They lifted his mattress, carried him out and along the street. As they passed on they encountered the crowd; progress was difficult; should they turn back? The eyes of the sufferer said, "Push on!" They reached the house; it was thronged; the doors were blocked; what now? "It's a matter of life or death," said the pleading eyes; "push on!" They carried him up the outer stairway; to their dismay they found the court roofed over; the voice of the Preacher could be heard below; they could not give up now. They tore away the tiling, and let the sufferer down like a dead man being lowered into a grave; but this man, lowered to the feet of Jesus, was coming nearer and nearer to life. Four good friends were these at the ropes, neighbors of a Christ-like sort (Luke 10:26). Alas for the man who has no friends to serve him in the time of need, none to pray for him, none to exercise faith in his behalf, none to take him to Jesus! One friend is good, two are better, four are better still. A twisted cord of many strands is not easily broken. And the test of all friendship is adversity. "How shall I test affection?" asked a youth of Namertes. "Lose thy purse," was the answer. The

friend worth having is one to stand by us in trouble, like these four; to weep with us in Baca, lift an end of our burden, encourage us to noble endeavor, visit us when the fever-card is on the door, and abide with us when heart and flesh are failing.

“The friends thou hast and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel.”

4. *The sufferer at Jesus' feet.* Here he lies, helpless, eager, turning his pathetic eyes upon the Master. The best of prayers is in that look. The four friends look down from the open roof expectant; their expectancy is the true “prayer of faith.” Will Jesus honor it?

He began by making a diagnosis of the case. He knew the malady at sight. Other physicians had said “palsy;” he probed deeper and pronounced it sin. They had discovered a mere symptom; he touched the seat of the trouble. It was heart-disease; a spiritual ailment. The man had passed sleepless nights, moaning and crying out. His attendants ascribed all this to physical pain. It was worse than that; it was the remorse that follows sin. Sin is the worst thing in the world. All the plagues and pestilences are nothing to it. “The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it.” Back of palsy, back of leprosy, back of every painful and loathsome malady is this dreadful blood-poison, sin. This is the living germ, the diabolical bacillus that fills all hospitals and peoples all graveyards. The paralytic's soul and conscience and flesh and bones were full of it.

Then Jesus proceeded to treatment. Having diagnosed the case at a glance he healed it with a word: “Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

This was genuine "absolution." But to the onlookers it must have seemed a strange *non sequitur*. In their eyes this was a clear case of palsy; and what the man wanted was to be healed of the palsy. Wherefore the cavillers entered a twofold objection on the spot: *First*, to forgive sin is the prerogative of God. In this they were quite right. "*Absolvo te*" is blasphemy on any but divine lips. The Protestant Reformation started just there. Tetzal was going about selling absolutions, indulgences and purgatorial releases, with a little chest whereon was written:

"Soon as the coin within the chest doth ring  
The sinner's soul shall into heaven spring."

Luther knew that neither Tetzal nor any other man whose breath is in his nostrils hath power on earth to forgive sins. Everybody knows it. The satisfactory answer of Jesus at this point was in his claim of godhood. It was only because of this that he presumed to say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." *Second*, it was objected that his absolution was a mere pretense. "Oho!" they said; "any one can mumble the words, 'Thy sins be forgiven,' but to make them effective is quite another thing. Had Jesus healed this man's palsy we should have seen the manifest tokens of his power; as it is we have heard merely a charlatan's charm. Let him give us something that we can see." Then Jesus, perceiving what they reasoned in their hearts, said, "Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk?" It was indeed all one to him with whom nothing is impossible; wherefore he turned to the paralytic, saying, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house." His prerogative to forgive sin was thus adventured upon his power to heal the palsy. The proof was complete, his



vindication triumphant; for on the instant the man arose, lifted his mattress and walked through their midst.

In this we observe the *rationale* of our Lord's miracles. They were designed to prepare the way for and substantiate his salvatorial work. His opening blind eyes meant that he could give sight to the darkened soul. His wiping away of leprosy meant that he could cleanse from spiritual pollution. His loosing the bonds of palsy meant that he could break a sinner's fetters and place him on his feet for ever. His power to forgive is the great fundamental fact. The cross is the centre of the moral universe. All history converges in it; the very stars of heaven revolve around it.

So the paralytic goes his way healed and forgiven. Doubtless his four faithful friends went with him. Of him and them alike we hear no more; but of their future we may rest assured, for they believed in Jesus. He spoke distinctly of their faith. It is written that when the four were letting down the sick man from above into the midst "he saw their faith." The blessing that followed was a blessing on their faith. All things are possible unto us if we believe. Faith wins deliverance for ourselves. Faith brings the unsaved to the feet of Jesus and loosens their bonds. Faith on the part of the militant church will yet subdue the nations to the gospel and, in realization of the poet's dream, bind the whole world "as with gold chains about the feet of God."

## JESUS LORD OF THE SABBATH.

MARK 2:23-28; 3:1-5.

OF current controversies respecting the conduct of life none is more important than the Sabbath question. It touches the deepest springs of character and welfare. As a man spends his Sabbaths so is he. Wherefore it is of the utmost moment that he should know the meaning of the Sabbath law.

Our Lord, driven out of Jerusalem, had come to Capernaum, and was henceforth to make his headquarters there. His enemies pursued him. On this occasion while he preached in the synagogue there were spies present watching him. They saw the man with the withered hand and knew that Jesus would probably heal him; and if he did so it would be a technical violation of the Sabbath law. He knew what was in their hearts, and he said unto them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil? to save life or to kill?" But they held their peace. "What man among you," he continued, "if he hath a sheep fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day, will not lay hold upon it and lift it out? But how much better is a man than a sheep!" His logic was good, but the traditions were against him. When he healed the withered hand he gave his enemies a distinct ground for accusation, and the shadow of the cross grew darker over him.

Christ is our exemplar in everything. We can make no mistake in following him. Imitation of Christ is the secret of right living. Let us also, therefore, watch him, not with hostile eyes like those of his Jewish pursuers, but with

the reverent purpose of shaping our conduct after his. His manner of Sabbath observance will furnish us with a safe rule for the keeping of the holy day.

I. Observe, to begin with, he rested from secular tasks. His carpenter-shop was closed. It is safe to say that money would not have tempted him to take down his saw or plane unless for a work of absolute necessity. The most rudimental precept as to the Sabbath has reference to the duty of physical rest. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work." And the sanction of the Sabbath, as here given, is manifestly permanent, inasmuch as it rests upon the divine example: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: *wherefore* the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." When that "for" and that "wherefore" shall lose their logical significance, or when it shall cease to be an historical fact that God rested after his six days of creative work, it will be time to speak about the abrogation of the Sabbath law.

The necessity of devoting one-seventh of our time to physical rest is written not only in Holy Scripture, but in the human constitution. During the Reign of Terror in France it was ordained that every tenth day should be set apart for this purpose. A fine was imposed for the keeping of the Sabbath, the object being to utterly eradicate this with every other religious observance. It was found, however, that the divine law would tolerate no such infringement. One-tenth was not the right proportion. The nation broke down under it and was obliged to restore the sanctions of the Lord's day.

It is stated that three million one hundred and forty-five thousand of our American people are at work every

Sabbath; one in ten of our wage-earners; a representative of every sixth family in the land. A portion of this labor is no doubt necessary. It is safe to say, however, that two million of these workmen might, without perceptible inconvenience in any quarter, be released from their unnatural bondage. Our Government is the chief sinner. In New York city the postal service goes on about as usual during the Lord's day. Hundreds of clerks and carriers are kept on duty. So also at Philadelphia and in every important city. If this be urged as a business necessity, it is enough to answer that London, the great centre of universal commerce, with its five millions of people, manages to get along without a Sunday delivery or collection of mails. In this matter we are needlessly defying God. In 1828 petitions from twenty-one States of the Union were sent to the Postmaster General calling for a cessation of the Sunday postal service. His reply was a complex illustration of impiety and demagogical impertinence. "So long," said he, "as the silver river flows and the green grass grows and the oceanic tides rise and fall on the first day of the week, so long shall the mails of this republic be circulated on that day." It is to be hoped that he spoke for himself alone, for no nation could deliver itself in that manner without provoking the wrath of a jealous God.

The Sunday newspaper is also a great sinner. It is at this moment the head and front of our offending with respect to the holy day. Observe some of the points in the indictment.

(1.) It is the worst paper of the week. No pretence is made that its columns are adjusted to the needs of the holy day. On the other hand, all items peculiarly abominable or salacious are tossed upon the desk of the Sunday editor. If this issue were made up of material

proper to be read on the Sabbath not a hundred copies could be disposed of.

(2.) Its preparation involves a vast amount of Sabbath work. To throw this blame upon the Monday issue is to resort to a very diaphanous subterfuge, for if there were no Sunday newspaper the Monday's issue could and would be prepared as formerly, without the necessity of working on the Lord's day.

(3.) It is training up an army of lads for Sunday work. To buy a paper of a newsboy seems a small matter to you. The average business man—not to say Christian—would hesitate to sell a corner lot on the Sabbath; but he forgets that to a newsboy the selling of papers is a matter of as much importance as the larger transaction would be to him. And this boy, remember, is being encouraged to believe that business may be properly transacted on the Sabbath. There are thousands of these boys in New York who are certain to carry that impression through life. And the people who patronize them are responsible for it.

(4.) It drags the world into our Sabbath life. You say you must have the news. Yet the news is the very thing that we should most desire to escape from on the Lord's day. "The world is too much with us." We are like the starling in the "Sentimental Journey," that, beating against its cage, cried, "I can't get out! I can't get out!" God's purpose in instituting the Sabbath was to give our souls an opportunity of quitting the world for a season and resting from the worry of it.

(5.) It keeps up traffic on the sacred day. The Sunday newspaper is sustained most largely by the income from its advertising columns. The merchant who patronizes them may delude himself with the idea that he has arrested his business for the Sabbath; but he has done nothing of the sort. He may have turned the key in

the lock on Saturday night, but he has taken effective means of continuing his traffic another way. If he were to send a bell-man up and down Broadway to cry, "Hear ye! hear ye! my place of business is closed for the Sabbath as becomes a Christian man, but it will be open tomorrow morning with such bargains as never were heard of!" it would be obvious that he was making a pretty fair thing of his Sabbath rest in a financial way. But this is the very thing you are doing through your advertisements in the Sunday press. The fact is that so far from resting, you are doing a very vigorous and profitable business on the Lord's day.

II. To return now to Christ's manner of keeping the Sabbath, observe that he desisted from secular amusements. If proof be called for, we reply that it goes without proving. To suggest that he might possibly have gone to an amphitheatre to witness a gladiatorial show on the Sabbath would be in the nature of gross impiety. We know him too well to entertain the thought.

The drift in our time is towards the opening of places of Sabbath amusement. The French people tried that experiment under the most favorable circumstances and are to-day groaning under it. The German people have also tried this experiment; and their Sunday beer-gardens are a weariness and an abomination. It is a poor time for Americans to institute the custom. The proposition is made as if in behalf of the workingmen, but this is mere pretence. In 1883 when a vigorous and persistent effort was made in England to open the museums and other places of amusement on the Sabbath, a canvass was made of the various labor guilds and associations with the following result: For Sunday opening, sixty-two organizations with a membership of 45,482. Against Sunday opening, two thousand four hundred and twelve organiza-

tions with a membership of 501,705. This ought to be conclusive as to one point, namely, that if we are to open our places of secular amusement on the Sabbath it is not for the benefit of the workingmen. Our wage-earners are well aware that Sunday amusements are the entering wedge for Sunday work, and that Sunday work means six days' wages for seven days' toil. Every place of amusement thrown open to the public means a relay of workmen to carry it on. The encroachment is gradual but the result is sure. Our wage-earners are familiar with the logic of the situation; if the holy day is to be made a holiday it is not because they desire it.

III. Our Lord attended church on the Sabbath. It was his custom to worship in the synagogue. The Sabbath is preëminently a time for the cultivation of the spiritual graces. Six days in the week we are in the midst of the world's work and worry. Brain and sinew are under the utmost tension. Matters of eternal moment go largely by default. This is preëminently true of the American people. Our ordinary business man is moderately sure of breaking down under the continuous strain. Our most common ailment is nervous debility. Possibly our disregard of Sabbath rest has something to do with it. God means that we shall quit the world one day in seven, lay off its cares and burdens and come up out of its mists and miasms to breathe the mountain air with him. Why is it that a sea voyage is so frequently prescribed for worn-out business men? The moment the ship hoists anchor the world recedes. Then follows a week of substantial exile. No more news now. Stocks may go up or go down, kingdoms may rise and fall, but the voyager knows it not. Oh blessed rest! The horizons of our life are pushed back. Our hearts are enlarged. There are depths above and deeps beneath. We are out of the

world! Every Sabbath ought to be like a sea voyage. It should carry us away from the hum and roar of traffic, from the distracting pursuits of the madding crowd, away from the world into the spiritual realms. This is the day of devotion, the day for spiritual growth and enjoyment in communion with God.

IV. Our Lord devoted himself on the Sabbath to charitable work. Many of his most helpful miracles were wrought upon that day. And why not? This is the day of days for mercy—to lift up the fallen, comfort the bereaved, feed the hungry, visit the sick, and impart instruction to such as are ignorant of spiritual things. If it cannot be said that philanthropy is worship it is certainly true that our Lord is pleased with kindness rendered to the least of his little ones. The Legend Beautiful has a lesson for us. To the monk kneeling in his chamber alone came

“the Blessed Vision  
Of our Lord, with light Elysian  
Like a vesture wrapped about him.”

Never had the monk known such transport. He knelt in rapt adoration. Then, on a sudden, the convent bell tolled the hour of charity. The poor were waiting at the monastery door for their accustomed dole; and to-day this monk was almoner.

“Deep distress and hesitation  
Mingled with his adoration;  
Should he go or should he stay?  
Should he leave the poor to wait  
Hungry at the convent gate  
Till the Vision passed away?  
Should he slight his radiant Guest,  
Slight this Visitant celestial,  
For a crowd of ragged, bestial  
Beggars at the convent gate?”



But a voice within reminded him that God required mercy and not sacrifice. Reluctantly he arose from his knees and with a last look at the Vision went forth to duty. He dispensed the daily alms, received the thanks of the poor and suffering, and then in haste returned. On entering his cell he paused with unspeakable delight,

“For the Vision still was standing  
As he left it there before,  
When the convent bell appalling,  
From its belfry calling, calling,  
Summoned him to feed the poor.  
Through the long hour intervening  
It had waited his return,  
And he felt his bosom burn,  
Comprehending all the meaning,  
When the Blessed Vision said,  
‘Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled!’”

Two words, in closing. *First*, “The Sabbath was made for man;” not, surely, that he might abuse it, but that he might apply it to his spiritual and eternal good. The day is a holy trust and we shall be held responsible for the right use of it.

*Second*, “The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” He has a property right in it. Time is his, for he made it. By a special and explicit designation the Sabbath is set apart as “the Lord’s Day.” The man who appropriates it to his own selfish uses is guilty of grand larceny indeed; for he is guilty of robbing God. Let us therefore use the day as not abusing it.

“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. . . . In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.”

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath.

## THE TWELVE CHOSEN.

MARK 3: 6-19.

THE Scribes and Pharisees had long been concerned as to their proper attitude towards Jesus. There were reasons not a few why they would have been glad to espouse his cause; but there were grave difficulties in the way. *First*, he was a man of the people. They had been looking for a Messiah who should come in regal splendor and restore the glory to Israel; but this Jesus, himself of humble birth and station, made his friends among the lowly. He "ate with publicans and sinners." *Second*, he was at odds with them respecting the ceremonial law. They were particular to the last degree as to tithes, ablutions, Sabbath scrupulosities, with other Levitical and traditional rites, while he, contemning these, insisted on such "weightier matters" as judgment, mercy, and faith. In general terms, they regarded religion as a veneering, he as an organic principle originating in the heart and sending out gracious influences through the life. *Third*, his treatment of them was not what they were accustomed to. He seemed to care nothing whatever for their good will. He constantly disparaged their judgment in spiritual things, denounced their inconsistencies, and warned the people against them as blind leaders of the blind. Under such circumstances it was scarcely to be expected that they would feel kindly towards him. Of late, however, matters had been reaching a crisis. His persistent activity and rapidly increasing popularity forced them to a clear pronouncement. Neutral ground was no

longer to be thought of. For or against; which should it be? Driven to that point, their way was clear. Once arrayed against him, they must go the full length. Thus we find them taking counsel with their old-time foes, the Herodians,\* "how they might destroy him."

Meanwhile the popularity of Jesus increased from day to day. The common people heard him gladly. Wherever he went they followed him. They had never heard such teaching; they had never seen such wonderful works. Crowds thronged about him in the streets, followed him into the open fields, stood upon the lakeshore while he discoursed to them from his little boat. This was the very congregation that he wanted. The multitudes, the multitudes of sinning, suffering, dying men, these were more precious in his sight than all the retinues of kings.

The time had come when, with this numerous following, his ministry must take more definite form. He must organize his forces. Wherefore he proceeds to call the Twelve, in whom we perceive the nucleus of the church: that mighty labor-guild which from this small beginning has covered the earth with its power, increasing from year to year and from century to century, as the outward form of that divine and indestructible fellowship which Jesus entitled "The kingdom of God."

The call of the Twelve was really threefold. *First*, they were called informally, as when the Lord found them by the seashore, at the receipt of customs, or elsewhere, engaged in common tasks, and said, "Follow me." This was a general call, such as all receive to the Christian life. *Second*, they were "ordained" to special and ex-

\* The Herodians were Sadducees in theology and in politics supporters of the Roman Government.

clusive service. This meant that they were to leave all and follow him. It was the "ministerial call." Thenceforth, forsaking secular tasks, they were to devote themselves wholly to the Master's work. He ordained them (1) to "be with him," (2) to preach, and (3) to work miracles in his name. The *third* call of the Twelve was after the resurrection of Jesus, when he breathed on them, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and sent them forth, endued with power, under the great commission of universal conquest. This was their final and distinct call to the apostolate.

1. Observe, these twelve apostles were all men. Why was no woman chosen to this office? Surely it was not because Jesus regarded woman as in any wise inferior to man. That was indeed the spirit of the age and land in which he lived, but the whole genius of his teaching was against it. If wife, mother and sister are dearer terms to-day than in the olden time, if womanhood is more respected the world over, it is most largely due to the gospel of Christ. Nevertheless there is a difference—not of relative importance but of gifts and fitness—which to ignore would be to go against nature. The duties which were laid upon the apostolate were of a peculiar sort. It is no reflection upon the dignity of womanhood to say that men were best fitted to discharge them. It would appear that, in the early church, the offices most nearly corresponding to that of the Twelve were held exclusively by men. There has always, however, been a large and blessed place for "ministering women," many of whom have reached the very highest point of usefulness. There are, indeed, diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all (1 Cor. 12:4-21).

2. There has been much conjecture as to our Lord's reason for choosing just twelve, no more and no less. We are reminded that "the number twelve symbolizes perfection and universality." Three was the symbol of Deity; four of the visible creation, as in the apocalyptic vision of the four beasts. "Three multiplied by four gives twelve, the number of those who were to go forth in the name of the blessed Trinity into the four quarters of the world." All this is interesting as speculation. It would appear, however, that, if there were any special reason for this particular choice, apart from mere convenience, it might be found in the number of the tribes of Israel in connection with the fact that the Christian church is set forth as the whole Israel of God.

3. The original apostles were all men of the people. There was not a rabbi, not an ascetic, not a philosopher, not a rich man, not a political dignitary among them. They were simply average men; such as would be likely to sympathize with the needs and longings of the masses. The most of them were Galileans; the single Judean among them was the unworthiest of all. Three of them were, possibly, in comfortable circumstances: Matthew, the publican, and the two sons of Zebedee, who carried on a fishing industry on the shores of Gennesaret; but Matthew's craft was despised, and that of the others a most humble one. All of them were industrious men, like the Master himself; who now, as then, has little use for the indolent and unthrifty. As to education, they had probably all learned the fundamentals in attendance on the rabbinical schools, but nothing more. John seems to have known somewhat of the Platonic philosophy; but this was probably picked up in the course of his long ministry; his clear, transcendental mind was disposed

that way. A "liberal education," as it was then understood, would have disqualified the Twelve for their work. The Lord had no need at this juncture for philosophers, certainly not for doctrinaires. The time would come for dogmatics and apologetics; and the man would be forthcoming. A place would presently be made for Paul, but not now (1 Cor. 9: 1; Acts 9: 15; 2 Cor. 12: 12; 2 Tim. 1: 11).

4. It will be well to observe that some of these apostles were married men. Curiously enough, Peter, the original primate, to whom the papacy is proudly traced, is referred to as "leading about a wife" (1 Cor. 9: 5; compare with Mark 1: 30). The doctrine of the celibacy of the clergy is an invention of the devil. Jesus sanctioned marriage; and in the early church it was regarded as "honorable in all" (Heb. 13: 4). The contrary view has resulted in abuses innumerable. It touches the sanctity of home and the family relation, in which are fostered all things pure and true. It is God himself who "setteth the solitary in families," and who shall presume to prevent it?

5. The Twelve were of diverse temperaments and qualifications. No two were alike. All sorts of materials are usable in the building up of the kingdom of Christ. It is customary to arrange these apostles in groups. *The first* consists of Peter, James and John, a glorious triumvirate, often called "the chosen three." They were all men of marked ability and distinct individuality. They were admitted into our Lord's inner confidence, as witnesses of his transfiguration and elsewhere. Peter, "the man of rock," was headstrong and impetuous, but a born leader. James and John were called *boanerges*, or "sons of thunder," on account of

their vehemence and fearlessness. James, who longed to be "baptized with the baptism of Jesus" (Matt. 20: 22), had his wish strangely fulfilled, in that he became the protomartyr, being "slain by Herod with the sword" (Acts 12: 2). John, "the beloved," outlived his fellow-disciples and, at the age of a hundred years, according to tradition, was dragged through the streets of Ephesus to be "ground as God's fine wheat by the teeth of lions." In the *second* group are Andrew, his name meaning "manly;" Philip the seeker (John 14: 8); Bartholomew, also called Nathanael, "the guileless" (John 1: 47), and Matthew, "the publican." Of these four Matthew is most influential and familiar to us as the author of the gospel bearing his name. The *third* group embraces the remainder of the Twelve: Thomas, "the doubter;" James the little, a cousin of Jesus, pastor of the church at Jerusalem, writer of "the Epistle of James;" Thaddeus, known also as Lebbeus and Jude, wherefore Jerome calls him *Trionymus*, the thrice-named; Simon, "the zealot;" and Judas Iscariot, always bearing the stigma, "which betrayed him." This recital and classification of the Twelve sufficiently indicates their diverse characteristics. Each had his own place to fill and was qualified to fill it.

6. A majority of the Twelve have left little or no record. So far as we know they were nobodies. Yet eternity may show that these were as important in their places as the others. God keeps the chronicles. Few are the leaders in a great war; the fighting is done by the rank and file. The little maid in Naaman's palace is mentioned only once, and that in passing, but who can estimate the far-reaching lines of influence that flowed from her modest life? The little lad who had the basket of loaves and fishes is not named, but he was an impor-

tant factor in the great miracle of feeding the multitude. If it is the Lord's will that we should serve in obscurity, so be it: only let us serve faithfully; and "he that seeth in secret shall reward us openly."

7. They formed an harmonious body. There was no jostling nor quarreling among them. It is significant that, in so small a company, there were three pairs of brothers: Andrew and Peter, James and John, James the Less and Jude; a lesson on brotherly love. Let it be observed, also, that the apostles were sent forth two by two; a lesson on sanctified friendship and cooperation. "Two are better than one; for if one fall the other will lift him up; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to lift him up."

8. Every man of the Twelve was a sinner. Some of them had glaring faults. One was a doubter, several were rash and impetuous, all were more or less tainted with cowardice; one was a hypocrite and traitor. If perfection were required in Christ's service we should all be left out. It is said that Minerva sprang full-armed from the forehead of Jove; but Christian character is a growth. Our graces are developed in the service, as grain matures in the field: "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

9. The Twelve were alike in having "seen the Lord." This was the prime requirement. When the vacancy caused by the defection of Judas was to be filled, search was made in prayer for one who might suitably serve as "a witness of the resurrection of Jesus" (Acts 1:15-26). So Paul in justifying his claim to the apostolic office referred to those occasions on which Jesus had personally appeared to him, saying, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord?" There is a sense,



therefore, in which the Twelve are without successors; and there is another sense in which "the apostolic succession" is a glorious fact. If we may not know Jesus after the flesh, nor yet behold him in visions, we may so dwell with him, serve with him, sit at his feet and obey his voice as that no earthly friend shall be so near or real to us.

10. The meaning of the word apostle is "sent." The apostles were sent ones; commissioned in the Master's name to go everywhere and bear witness to his glorious gospel. In this sense all who love Jesus and give heed to the great commission, "Go ye," are apostles. All whom he calls are called to be witnesses of the truth. All whom he "ordains" are ordained to take part in the great propaganda. Remember the word of the Lord Jesus, how he said: "As the Father hath sent me into the world so send I you."

Had the Twelve, chosen as we have seen, announced in the presence of the Sanhedrin that their purpose was the conquest of the world, a general shout of laughter would have greeted them. But that was the truth, and these nineteen centuries have vindicated it. One by one the Twelve were led away to ax or fagot; but the blood of the martyrs is ever the seed of the church. The six-score Christians of Ascension Day have become many millions; and still the royal standards onward go. The Kingdom of God is leaven which a woman took and put in three measures of meal; and it leavened the whole lump. The Church of Jesus Christ has in it the power of an indestructible life and the promise of eternal growth "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

LUKE 6:20-31.

THE time for the setting up of Christ's kingdom had fully come. The Twelve had been called and ordained as the King's Cabinet. They must now be instructed as to the underlying principles of the new society. All night had they been in the mountain with the Master; all night in prayer. Great crises draw the soul towards the Infinite. The gift of the knees is the gift of power. A night at the throne of grace assures a day of blessing. So Jesus came down in the morning and stood with his disciples in the plain, and a great multitude awaited them—a greater multitude, indeed, than fleshly eyes could see; for the King's inaugural was to be delivered and the whole world must hear. As he spoke the hills receded, the amphitheatre enlarged, all the nations and all the centuries came crowding into view. Forums and parliaments, royal audiences and Runnymedes were nothing to this. The Prince Emanuel was to set forth principles of government which, in his kingdom of truth and righteousness, were destined to outlast the foundations of the everlasting hills.

The Sermon on the Mount reaches its climax in the Golden Rule. The beatitudes, the parables, the expositions of Mosaic maxims, the wise counsels and admonitions all lead up to it. This is the *aureum milleareum*, the end of the journey, where all truth-seekers put off "their pilgrim shoon." This is the heart of religion, whither all its life currents, coursing to and fro, ever re-

*turn: As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*

1. At the outset a rule of some sort was necessary. Every government must have its constitution, a system of principles cohering about a central truth. Every labor-guild must have its covenant, binding each to the other and all to a common interest. The church is at once government and labor-guild, wherefore its ruling principle must recognize both king and commonwealth. The Golden Rule echoes both tables of the Decalogue. It derives the brotherhood of man from the fatherhood of God.

2. The rule must be a perfect one. Souls on their way to judgment must have an accurate standard of measurement. The law of the kingdom must be like the sun, which regulates all other chronometers. To a boy on his way to school or a man going to market the number of inches in a linear foot is not a matter of supreme importance, but the thing assumes a different color when one sets out to traverse the circumference of the earth. It is the business of the government to keep and furnish correct standards of weight and measure. God's kingdom rests on absolute truth. There must be no flaws in its prescription as to the conduct of life. There are none in the Golden Rule. The man never lived who was bold enough to find fault with it.

Nevertheless, there is danger of making too much of the Golden Rule. Everything has its just value. The cross itself may be made a fetich. Water in sufficient quantities is as fatal as rum. Wherefore it may be well, at this point, to qualify our eulogium of the Golden Rule.

*First.* It is not wholly original in the teaching of

Christ. Isocrates had said, "Do nothing to others which would offend you if they should retaliate in kind." Confucius wrote, "Do not to your neighbors that which is odious to you." The rabbis relate that when one went to Hillel, saying, "Tell me the whole law quickly, while I stand on one foot," he answered, "What is displeasing to thee do not to another; this is the whole law." But observe, in all these cases the injunction is given in the negative. This makes a great difference. It is one thing to say, Thou shalt not hate God, and another to say, Love him with all thy heart. Rob not thy neighbor is a large precept, but Give alms is a larger. A brazen image can keep the command, Do not, but it takes a man to do. And further, observe, it is nothing against a Scriptural precept to say it is not original, but rather in its favor. All true ethics have their ground in a constitutional and universal sense of right. The conscience "accusing or excusing" comes before the Scriptures; and when they speak it must needs answer, "I knew that all along." The glory of the Word is in its bringing man to himself; in reminding him of things which he knew but had forgotten. It gathers together the best intuitions of the race, all its faint memories of lost greatness, all that is true in the false religions, the sum and substance of all divine visions and revelations, and binds them into one bundle of truth. Its proof of divineness is not in its novelty, but in its blessed loyalty to the things which are as ancient as the heart and conscience of the race.

*Second.* The Golden Rule is not an all-embracing statute. It does not exhaust ethics. It stands not as a solitary and dislocated maxim. Some things go before it, some come after. In Matthew it is introduced by the word "therefore" (Matt. 7: 12), which refers backward

to certain injunctions touching prayer. The just relations of man are only to be understood as they rest upon his relations with God. There are two tables of the Law, one respecting piety, the other philanthropy; and they stand in logical order. Jesus said, "The first and greatest commandment is this: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: on these two hang all the Law and the Prophets." Thus God is at top and bottom of all. To leave him out of the account is to make the Golden Rule as vain as "a painted ship upon a painted ocean." To say, "I want nothing but the Golden Rule to live and die by," is to speak without thinking. As if a man were to say, "What care I for fountains? the brook is enough;" or, "What care I for roots? give me apples;" or, "What care I for wheels and mainsprings? I want the time of day."

*Third.* The Golden Rule has no power to save. It was not intended to save. Salvation involves the blotting out of sin. There is here no adaptation of the means to the end. A grocer must have his business code, but he would not offer to pay his debts with it. Everything to its use. Sinai was for the building up of character; the altar at its foot was for the expiation of guilt. In the Sermon on the Mount we observe a startling omission: there is not a word about the atonement. But there is enough about it elsewhere. Christ was dealing just then with conduct. The cross would come in due season. This Sermon was, indeed, a prelude to it. Men who say the Sermon on the Mount is gospel enough for them would scarcely, on sober thought, be willing to go to judgment that way. Have they lived by it? Nay, its requirements are more exacting than those of Sinai. It stands as a

universal indictment, for not a living man has kept it. Retributive justice flashes through the Golden Rule like lightning on a summer's day.

3. For all the uses of common life this is aptly called "The Golden Rule." Here are mines that would enrich the world; inexhaustible veins of treasure.

(1) The practice of this rule between man and man would glorify life in all its relations. How like antechambers of heaven our homes would be! No envies or jealousies, no wranglings or selfish contentions, but "each in honor preferring one another." What changes would be wrought in social life! Evil speaking and uncharitable judgment would be ruled out; all would go singing:

"The mercy I to others show,  
That mercy show to me."

Social distinctions might remain, but Caste, with its supercilious air and sidelong glance, would die the death. Virtue would outshine diamonds and character would crowd noble birth to the wall. In the places of industry master and man would vex each other no more. Strikes and boycotts would cease. There would be fair dealing all around. Pale-faced women would no longer sew their lives into gusset and seam. Shylock would move out of Chatham Street. Bargains on the Stock Exchange would change their complexion. And everywhere, in shops and markets, that pagan maxim, "Honesty is the best policy"—which keeps a man trusty only so long as he is watched—would give place to a wiser and better: "Each for the other and all for God."

(2) And what if this Golden Rule were applied in politics? What problems would be solved, what wrongs righted! The "Geary" law, laying an intolerable burden

on a few friendless Mongolians, would straightway become a memory of the past. The miserable remnant of our Indian tribes would no longer be robbed and debauched and driven to desperation. We have been a long while finding out the wisdom of that Leyden pastor who wrote to Miles Standish, "To my thinking, Captain, it were better to convert those Indians than to slay them." That surely would be in the spirit of the Golden Rule. And our Freedmen, too, would be helped upon their feet. The story of their wrongs makes the darkest page in our American history. They were transported by our fathers in the suffocating holds of slave ships. For two hundred years they suffered in chains, their minds benighted, their virtue a plaything, their very humanity an open question. Then came freedom, and now they are struggling hard for life and manhood. What says the Golden Rule? Help them to their feet! Give them the benefit of courts and public schools and the ballot. This is the Christlike way of solving the vexatious difficulty. To pursue any other would be but to heal the hurt slightly and tempt the danger of a festering sore. "Nothing is settled until it is settled right." This is the sword that cuts all Gordian knots in politics: Do as you would be done by.

(3) And if an international application of this Rule were made it would usher in the Golden Age. To-day there are three great monarchies which hover like vultures over the more or less mutilated bodies of other governments beyond the sea. Nothing apparently prevents their gorging themselves except their mutual dread of each other. Yet, experience being our teacher, it is only a question of time when all will lose their pre-eminence. The time approaches when the Golden Rule—whose other name is peaceful arbitration—will take the place of fleets and

standing armies ; when swords shall be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. It is said that when Ruskin was furnishing his country home a friend suggested damask curtains. "Damask curtains, indeed !" he replied. "All very fine, but I can't afford them just now." "I thought," said his friend, "you had a splendid income." "So I have, but I am spending it all on steel traps." "Steel traps?" "Yes, for protection against yon fellow on the other side of the wall." "But aren't you friends?" "Aye, rarely ; but I am taking lessons of our government, that spends millions on materials of war to keep the peace." It was a rude way of deriding a great folly. For why should not the Golden Rule prevail among nations as among men? Let us hope and pray for that blessed dawn of peace when the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's meat (Is. 65:25). Fly swifter round, ye wheels of time, and bring the welcome day !

But while we thus dream dreams and see visions of a glorious future let us be mindful that the nations are but coteries of men and that the world is all the while what you and I are making it. The Golden Rule is for personal use. One day filled with it would be like a bit of heaven. A life spent thus would be a wholly Christ-like life. But to attain this end we must, like Christ, begin with God. The first Commandment is the ground and inspiration of the second. No man can be my own brother until God is my own Father. And God's fatherhood will never be known until Christ, in whom he reveals himself, is believed in as Brother of all. In giving him God gave the Golden Rule ; in receiving him we keep it.



## OPPOSITION TO CHRIST.

MARK 3:22-35.

THE leaders of Israel had parted company with Jesus finally and irrevocably. What else could they do? He had brought their teaching into contempt and their lives into the light. He had made them a gazing-stock to the people who had previously hearkened to them as to divine oracles. Had he wished he might easily have won their patronage, but he had chosen otherwise and must take the consequences. A price was thenceforth upon his head. Secret conclaves were held and plots laid for his destruction. He was at this time teaching in Capernaum. Thither a company of Scribes were sent to spy upon him. They dogged his steps, they whispered innuendoes, they sought to ensnare him with hard questions, and all else failing they charged him with being in collusion with the prince of darkness. This desperate charge was (1) a tribute to his popularity. The multitudes were indeed bewitched by his preaching and miracles. (2) It was, moreover, a distinct admission of his wonder-working power. There was no questioning the facts. The healed, the cleansed, the dispossessed demoniacs stood by. (3) It was, still further, a betrayal of their own malevolent purpose. The fire of diabolical hatred shone in their eyes.

We can but wonder at the patience of Jesus. He could have slain them by the lifting of his finger. With a glance he might have pierced them as with a flash of lightning. But instead, he graciously admonished them.

He stooped to argument. They had charged him with "casting out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils." Observe his fourfold confutation. *First*, on the ground of common sense: "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Shall the prince of darkness turn his enmity against himself? This would be plain suicide. *Second*, a *reductio ad absurdum*. If Satan could not rise up against himself, no more would he combine with Jesus to accomplish his own defeat. It was preposterous that his house should thus be divided against itself. Satan was no fool. *Third*, the Scribes were made to testify to their own confusion. In Matthew's account this word is added: "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? let them be your judges" (Matt. 11:19). For there were some of themselves, like the seven sons of the priest Sceva, who claimed the power of exorcism. Our Lord by no means admitted the genuineness of that claim, but desired to know whether those of their own household were in league with Satan. This drove the argument straight home. *Fourth*, an appeal was made to their experience. Did they ever know a case wherein a strong man's house was spoiled unless it was done by one mightier? Must not the strong man himself be bound before his house could be looted? Was it not plain, therefore, that in making this charge against Jesus they admitted his superiority to Satan? Allies do not plunder each others' castles. Foe fights foe and the stronger plunders the weaker. And for this very cause had he come into the world, that he might destroy the works of the devil. He had thwarted him in the wilderness, had worsted him in many a hand to hand conflict for the deliverance of his victims, was binding him and spoiling his house from day to day; and the time was coming when he would lay

hold of the dragon, bind him with eternal chains and cast him into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20 : 3).

At this point our Lord, leaving his controversy with the scribes and taking their fatuous opposition as his text, discoursed to the assembled multitude on the awful sin of rejecting his Messianic claims and overtures of mercy. As this is the crowning sin of sins it behooves us to give heed.

1. How is Christ presented for our acceptance? Here is the special function of the Holy Ghost. The Lord himself has passed from fleshly sight. He no longer walks through the village streets or stands upon the hill-sides stretching forth his hands and saying, "Come unto me." But the Holy Ghost is with us. "It is expedient," said Jesus, "that I go away; but I will send the Comforter, and he will guide you into all truth. He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you."

(1) His power is manifest in the effective preaching of the truth. It is the hand of the Spirit that touches the lips of the messenger with fire; it is the influence of the Spirit that opens the doors of the hearer's heart. "Take heed how ye hear" is a wise admonition; for the gospel as set forth in the sanctuary is a savor of life unto life or else of death unto death. The moment we cross the threshold of the church we are in the atmosphere of the Spirit. To be heedless now is to grieve him. To hear aright is to enter into life. For whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed indeed. The word preached is a presentation of the Word incarnate. To reject it is to reject Christ: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye

should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"

(2) The power of the Spirit in the presentation of Christ is manifest also in the reading of the Scriptures. "Search the Scriptures," the Master said, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me." It is possible to assume such an attitude towards the Bible that its truths shall repel and injure us; like those flowers in "Faust" which, dropped from an angel's hand, were changed to burning coals. It is much to be feared that, in these days, the prevailing spirit of irreverent criticism bars our way to blessing. It is one thing to scrutinize the Scriptures with curious eyes as no more to us than other books, like experts deciphering old inscriptions, and quite another to search them, under all possible lights and with all possible implements, as for hid treasure. A sincere and serious student of the Bible, reading it under the clear light of the Spirit, must see the marred but beautiful face of Jesus looking forth from every page, and discern between its lines everywhere the story of redeeming love. To read it otherwise is to grieve the Spirit. He cannot lead us into truth if heart and intellect are averse to it.

"Within this awful volume lies  
The mystery of mysteries.  
Happiest they of human race  
To whom our God has granted grace  
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,  
To lift the latch and force the way."

(3) The influence of the Spirit is still further put forth in numberless allurements by which we are continually drawn towards Christ. "There are so many voices, and none of them is without signification;" voices of na-

ture, history, special providence, personal observation, reason, memory, and conscience speaking in the inner man. The word of God is not bound; he worketh whensoever and wheresoever he will. If angels come no more, the winds shall bring his message. If the open vision has ceased and the lamps of the sanctuary are gone out, the stars of heaven shall find a voice and the flowers of the field whisper "Come." The gracious One will never leave himself without a witness. Many a man deeming himself forsaken has been drawn of the Spirit as veritably as was Jacob when he "put the stones for his pillow and lay down to sleep;" but, alas, too often he must confess, "I knew it not." A sailor lad who, fleeing from the restraints of home, wandered far away, was haunted by a voice like a cooing dove. At night when he lay sleepless in his hammock it reminded him of home and mother, of the village church, the "old ha' Bible" and the good-night prayer; and at last it brought him back a penitent. Voices, voices everywhere. The Spirit is abroad in the earth calling men to truth and goodness. He is not willing that any man should die, but that all should turn and live.

2. How, now, are these influences opposed, and how is Christ rejected when thus offered as Saviour and Friend?

*First*, by continuance in known sin. Sin and Christ are sworn foes. No man can serve both; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will cling to the one and despise the other. To persist in an evil habit is to reject the proffered kindness of him who came to break every chain and bid the oppressed go free.

*Second*, by delay. It is much to be doubted if any intend to be lost. All would be saved, but not now.

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow;  
Creeps in this petty space from day to day  
Till the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death."

Opportunity is like a silken thread let down from heaven; a breath may thrust it aside, but to grasp it is to feel the electric thrill of divine love through and through. The Saviour walks beside us along our journey from the cradle to the grave, speaking with us, reasoning, remonstrating, pleading; and from day to day we heed him not.

*Third*, by downright and explicit abandonment. When a man finally concludes that he will have no more of Jesus and arrays himself against him, that ends it. This was the case with the scribes. They not only refused the personal appeals of Jesus, not only resented his admonitions, not only denied his Messianic claims and opposed his work, but went so far as to blasphemously charge that he was in collusion with the prince of devils. In doing this they sinned against the Holy Ghost, who worked in them, as in all, to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ.

And this is *the unpardonable sin*. The reason for calling it "the sin against the Holy Ghost" is obvious. To be heedless of the influence that ever works within us for our advancement in right thinking and holy living is to "grieve the Spirit." To set ourselves against that influence is to "resist the Spirit." To violently reject it is to "quench the Spirit." And these three steps are the descent to death. The last is fatal; wherefore it is called "the sin unto death."

This sin is (1) in the nature of *lèse majesté*, and is immeasurably heinous. (2) It is a sin against nature,

involving the violation of both reason and conscience. (3) It is wilful and deliberate, being committed in the face of admonitions and entreaties, with a full knowledge of the consequences. Augustine says, "That man sins against the Holy Ghost who, despairing, or deriding and despising the preaching of grace by which sins are washed away, and of peace by which we are reconciled to God, refuses to repent of his sins, and resolves that he must go on hardening himself in a certain impious and fatal sweetness of them, and persists therein to the end." (4) This leaves the spiritual nature practically dead and helpless. The presence of fear or self-accusation is proof presumptive that the unpardonable sin has not been committed. Men upon whom the death-sentence has been executed are not sensitive to fear. (5) This sin is unpardonable not because of any unwillingness on God's part, but in the nature of the case. It is itself a final refusal of pardon offered in Christ. God is able and willing to save unto the uttermost, but there must be personal consent. In this case personal consent is impossible. The door of escape is closed. (6) The doom of the one thus guilty is, to be left to himself for ever. Our Lord says, "He is in danger of eternal damnation;" which would be better rendered, "is guilty of an eternal sin." This means that he is bound in a chain that can never be broken. His exclusion from heaven is not God's doing but wholly his own. He prefers sin, and his doom is to go on sinning for ever. This is spiritual death, exclusion from the company of the redeemed and the presence of God.

"There is a death whose pang  
Outlasts this fleeting breath;  
Oh, what eternal horrors hang  
Around the second death!"

3. It remains to consider how Christ may be accepted. The Holy Spirit is ever "receiving of the things of Jesus and showing them unto us." It is possible for us at any moment to close in with his overtures of grace. If one would take a journey he must needs begin with one step. The first step of the Christian life is in the manly words "I will." The turning-point in the story of the prodigal was when, brought to himself by a contemplation of his poverty, he said, "I will arise and go." To thus accept of eternal life in Jesus Christ is to honor the Father who sent and the Spirit who commends him. Thus in an instant the soul is reconciled to the triune God; and this is to enter into life.

The privileges that follow are beyond all reckoning, but chiefest of all is the mystical union of the believer with his Lord. It is closer than friendship, nearer and dearer than the dearest kinship. And Jesus, looking round about on his disciples, said, "Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." The mystic bond of union is so close that it must needs be characterized as oneness, finding its best illustration in the incomprehensible union of the persons of the ineffable Godhead: "As thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." We are lost in wonder, bewildered in view of the possibilities that open before us. Oh, the depth of the riches of grace! "Beloved, now are we sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.



## CHRIST TEACHING BY PARABLES.

LUKE 8. 4-15.

THE time had come for a radical change in our Lord's method of teaching. His popularity was on the wane. The crowds that had followed him from place to place, attracted by his eloquence and miracles, were now beginning to take offence. His divine claims bewildered them. His doctrine of sin shone into their guilty hearts like a candle in a dark place. His call to exclusive service seemed like a mailed hand smiting the pleasures of life. Thus it is written, "From that time many of them went back and walked no more with him."

It was at this juncture that he "began to speak in parables."\* His purpose in so doing was threefold. *First*, to impart truth to his disciples in picturesque form. It was not strange that they were puzzled at the first, for the method was quite new; but he gave them the key; and thereafter his parabolic teaching was like the Shechinah, dark to the Egyptians but light to God's people. Teaching by object-lessons is indeed the simplest as well as the most effective. It is the kindergarten plan, and therefore specially adapted to the uses of Christ's kingdom, which none can enter save those of a childlike spirit (Mark 10: 15). *Second*, it was designed to attract the masses. It would enlist their curiosity. There is nothing like the charm of a hidden meaning. At the same time

\* The difference between a *fable* and a *parable* is that, while the former pays no regard to probability, the latter takes its imagery from nature and is true to life.

there was much of truth upon the surface of the parables for all; surface gold everywhere but inexhaustible mines beneath. The words and phrases were of the simplest sort, and the metaphors were from common scenes and occupations. There was no affectation of learning; no attempt at profundity. Had Jesus expressed himself in such terminology as some of our modern philosophers employ he might have won the cultured few but not the people. Herbert Spencer defines life in this way: "It is a definite combination of heterogeneous changes both simultaneous and successive in correspondence with certain external coexistences and sequences." The use of the parable was the very opposite of this method; wherefore "the common people heard him gladly." *Third.* It perplexed and mystified those who were averse to the truth. The Scribes and Pharisees who listened only to criticise were unable to make anything of it. The veil which was transparent to the humble and attentive was impenetrable to the wise in their own conceits. Thus Jesus said "Unto you—my disciples—it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see and hearing they might not understand." This was in the nature of what Godet calls "intermediate judgment." Blindness is punished by blindness. "Unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." It was the deliberate wish of Jesus, merciful as well as judicial and retributive, that those who desired to see only to their own hurt should not see at all.

The first of the many parables of our Lord was that of the Sower and the Seed. Dean Stanley says: "Is there anything on the spot to suggest the imagery? So

I asked as I rode along the tract under the hillside by which the plain of Gennesaret is approached. I saw nothing but the steep sides of the hill, alternately of rock and grass. But the thought had hardly occurred to me when a slight recess, close upon the plain, disclosed at once, in detail and with a conjunction which I remember nowhere else in Palestine, every feature of the great parable. There was the undulating cornfield descending to the water's edge; there was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent the seed from falling here and there on either side or upon it; itself hard with the tramp of horse and mule and human foot." Such was the scene, doubtless, toward which the Master with a wave of his hand directed the attention of the multitude as he began to say, "A sower went forth to sow."

*The Sower* was primarily Christ himself, who came to declare the truth of the kingdom; and with him the Twelve and all others in the goodly fellowship of Christian service. It is a glorious thing to be a minister of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Many there are who sigh, like good Nicholas Breton,

"I would I were an excellent divine  
That had the Bible at my fingers' ends,  
That men might hear out of this mouth of mine  
How God doth make his enemies his friends."

But, indeed, all disciples of Christ are "excellent divines" if continually they scatter the seed of the kingdom by seasonable words and holy living. The humblest may have "the Bible at his fingers' ends," and from its glorious messages of truth and righteousness may show "how God doth make his enemies his friends."

"*The seed* of the kingdom is the word of God." The

figure is aptly chosen ; for the word has in it the germ of an endless life and perpetual growth, and from it ripen the harvests that feed the deepest craving of the children of men.

*And the soil* is the human heart. Here is great diversity. Hearts, like fields, are of an individual sort ; yet, for fruitfulness, all must be alike in welcoming the seed and lying open to the sun. It is in spiritual as in worldly husbandry : in vain does the sower go forth to sow if the soil refuse the seed.

1. *The wayside.* Here the earth is beaten hard by constant passing to and fro. This trodden path refuses to be tilled ; it sheds the falling dews and rains ; the sunshine that should quicken merely bakes it. The seed that by chance falls upon it is to be devoured by the fowls of the air. And when the reaper comes, he swings his sickle on either side but not there. It yields no harvest ; it feeds no hunger.

*So are the gospel-hardened.* " Those by the wayside are they that hear." To them the gospel is an oft-told tale. They heard it long ago at their mothers' knees, they heard it from the lips of the village preacher, they have read it from their Bibles, studied it in their catechisms. They sit in their pews and are pleased to hear it eloquently set forth with each returning Sabbath. To them the preacher is, like Ezekiel of old, " a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words but they do them not." The gospel goes in at Eargate and out again at Eargate, making but a formal call *en passant*. It has lost all charm of novelty. Familiarity with it has bred in them an unwitting contempt. If the eloquence of the preacher flags for a moment their wits go wool-gathering.

Wandering thoughts swoop down like crows to gather up whatever seed may have fallen on the dry, hard surface of their hearts. It is for such as these that "sensational preaching" is in perpetual demand. The appetite, grown weary of eating plain food and not digesting it, craves constantly new spices and condiments. Nor do these avail. The honest, sedulous, mistaken and vain efforts which we ministers make to get and hold the attention of such spiritual epicures reminds one of what Thevenot says in his "Oriental Travels": "I observed one day a pleasant thing which is practiced in all that country as far as Abassi: I saw several peasants running about the cornfield, raising their voices and cracking their whips with all possible force to drive away the birds. When they see flocks coming from a distance they redouble their cries to make them fly farther. The truth is there are so many birds in this country that they destroy all things. Even the scarecrows are so far from frightening them that they will come and perch upon them."

There were many among the hearers of Jesus, as he went about among the villages of Galilee, whose hearts were like the beaten path. The Scribes and Pharisees were devoted to continual study of the Scriptures, yet its Messianic psalms and prophecies were no more to them than the droning of bees. In the immediate company of the disciples there was one who followed Jesus day by day, saw his miracles and heard him speak as never man spake, yet to so little purpose that a matter of thirty pieces of silver was sufficient to devour all good impressions. Everything has its compensations. Let us thank God that we live in the midst of gospel privileges; yet danger lies that way, the danger of callousness. Peasants who dwell in the vale of Chamounix are seldom

moved by its beauty as was Coleridge, who merely passed that way.

2. *The stony ground.* A little soil covering the surface of a great boulder will take the seed and cherish it for a while. All's well so long as nothing hinders; but a hot sun will scorch the life out of it.

*So is the impressionable, unreflecting, impulsive hearer.* "He heareth the word and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself but dureth for a while." His impressions of truth are real but transient. He cannot stand trial. He journeys well along a level road, but the sight of an alpenstock appals him. James says he is "like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

Our Lord called for thoughtful disciples. "If any will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." On one occasion he called attention to a heap of stones lying along the way, representing the ill-considered dream of some ambitious landlord, and said, "Which of you intending to build a tower sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, lest haply after he hath laid the foundation all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish." Thus the Master was ever exhorting to thoughtfulness. Think; think for yourself, was his constant word. A man once came to him saying, "Lord, I will follow thee, whithersoever thou goest." A strange answer was that which he received: "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." It was a hard saying, but kindly meant. It was better that the truth should be known at the outset. Other armies are mustered with drum-beat

and vivas, but not the army of the cross. It is serious business to follow Christ. It means weary marching and hard fighting, and "there is no discharge in that war."

The historian Froude thus describes the volunteers who gathered about Catiline: "Smooth-faced, with curled hair and redolent of perfume, as yet beardless or with the first down upon their cheeks, wearing scarves and veils and sleeved tunics reaching to their ankles, industrious only with the dice-box, night-watchers but in supper-rooms, immodest, dissolute boys, whose education had been in learning to love and be loved, to sing and dance at midnight orgies." Was it a wonder, then, that Catiline failed in his great conspiracy? A war of mere enthusiasm is ever a fiasco. Earnestness is always the earnest of success. Jesus wants an army of resolute men, whose enlistment is in the line of duty, whose impulses are grounded in conviction, and whose feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel that they may be able to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand.

3. *The thorny ground.* There are twenty-two words in the Hebrew Scriptures referring to brambles and other prickly weeds. Palestine was infested with them. If once they got the better of a farmer's industry his crops were strangled and his field was good for naught.

*So is the preoccupied heart*; the heart that welcomes truth only to a conflict with worldly cares and the deceitfulness of riches. The religious life that shares its domicile with such rank and noxious neighbors is sure to be crowded out. How many a soul, setting out with bright hope and earnest resolution, has thus degenerated into mere formalism, which is spiritual death. "Choked" is the word upon the tombstone. This was the case with the man who, when our Lord was discoursing on the sol-

emn things of eternity, interrupted him to say, "Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." This was the case also with the young ruler who prostrated himself before Jesus crying, "Good Master, what shall I do that I might inherit eternal life?" but when the answer came, "Go, sell all that thou hast and come and follow me," went away sorrowful, for he was very rich. Alas, that was the great refusal; and it was due to a preëmption of the heart.

"Care, when it once hath entered in the breast,  
Will have the whole possession ere it rest."

But Jesus demands the whole heart. Truth is as jealous of rivals as the corn is of thistles. To one or the other the heart like the field must be wholly given up.

4. *The good ground.* This is the honest heart and true, that having heard the word "keepeth it, and bringeth forth fruit with patience."

This fruit is character and usefulness. Truth is the seed of all that is needful and hopeful in human life. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." The word "belief" is traced to the Saxon *by-lifian*, the thing we live by. If a man believe in Jesus he will copy his graces and busy himself in the things of his kingdom. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. These, when bound together in one bundle, make character and, when put out at usury, make usefulness. It is the Lord's desire that his people should make their lives tell. Fruit is what he asks; "much fruit," "more fruit," (John 15: 1-5.) And fruitfulness is the evidence of life. Irenæus quotes from one of the traditions of the early churches as follows: "The Lord taught, saying, 'The days will come in which vines shall



spring up each having ten thousand stocks, and on each stock ten thousand branches, and on each branch ten thousand grapes; and each grape when it is pressed shall yield five-and-twenty measures of wine. And when any saint shall have seized one bunch, another shall cry, I am a better bunch; take me, and through me bless the Lord!"

Thus Jesus taught the importance of receiving the truth aright. The lesson is old yet ever pertinent, "Take heed how ye hear." Let the fallow ground of the heart be always in the mood of tillage. Cut down the briers, cast out the stones, turn over the beaten path. Suns and showers are God's to give, but ours are the hearts that, fostering the truth must ever lie, like a field upon the hillside, open to all gracious influences from above. We are wont to plead earnestly in behalf of sacred teachers for the gift of tongues. Might it not be well also to covet for ourselves the gift of ears? There are some creatures among the lower orders whose auricular organs are so constructed that they can only hear the smallest sounds. They can detect the hum of insects, the murmur of brooks, the whisper of zephyrs; but they are deaf to the roar of the earthquake and the rumble of heaven's artillery. In like manner there are some among us who are attentive to all that occurs along the sensual levels, the call to wealth and pleasure and perishable honors, but cannot hear the voice of God inviting to duty and right conduct, to life and immortality. When the Omnipotent speaks let us hearken. When truth demands an audience let us throw wide the door. Oh, for the hearing ear and the understanding heart, that the truth may have free course and be glorified in us!

## THE TWELVE SENT FORTH.

MATT. 10 : 5-16.

THE original call of the Twelve was not so much to the active work of the apostolate as to preparation. It is written that Jesus called them "to be with him." This was their theological seminary ; to live with him, see his manner of life, behold his miracles and hear his exposition of the great verities that belong to the kingdom of God. In like manner Moses was trained for his work by communion with Jehovah in the solitudes of Midian and face to face converse with him in "the mountain that burned with fire." So Isaiah was made fit and ready for his prophetic office by seeing the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, with the heavenly retinue about him : as he relates, "I heard his voice saying 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for me?' Then said I, 'Here am I ; send me.'" This is ever the best training for the ministry. No amount of dogmatics and homiletics can take the place of it.

But the disciples had been with Jesus now for more than a year. They had been his inseparable companions, following him about from place to place. The time had come to send them forth. They had been long enough with Jesus to learn his purpose, to catch the genius of his ministry. They knew now what "the kingdom" meant, the kingdom of truth and righteousness which was ultimately to be established in all the earth, taking its rise in the hearts and consciences of men. It was not wise that they should continue in this close companion-

ship of the Master. They must be taught independence. Otherwise what would become of them when he should be taken away? Even the mother-bird knows that a fledgeling must be dropped from the nest. So, as Mark says, "Jesus called unto him the Twelve and began to send them forth."

They were about to make their first missionary journey. Twice had they made the circuit of the Galilean villages in company with Jesus. Now they were to go by themselves. But before sending them he gave them specific instructions and endowed them with special gifts.

1. *His first word was "Go."* This was the keynote of the great commission for all ages. At the first they were to confine themselves to a ministry among the Jews: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." For this there was a special reason. "Let the children first be filled." It was meet that the gospel should at the outset be fairly presented to those who had received the oracles and entered into covenant with God. "To the Jew first and also to the Gentile," was the predetermined order. But it was merely an order of time. The Jews were to have no advantage of others in the acceptance of grace.

It had been prophesied from the beginning that salvation, once offered to Israel and rejected, was to be carried to all nations. Wherefore the last command of Jesus, addressed to the disciples on the day of his ascension, was, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, beginning at Jerusalem." "Charity begins at home" but it does not stay there. The empire of Christ was to be universal. Jerusalem was the starting point and centre of operations, from which were to go forth lines of influence to the uttermost parts of the earth.

There is a peculiar significance in Mark's words: "He began to send them forth." This was indeed but the beginning of the great propaganda, the first of an endless series of missionary journeys. There have been times when the church has almost forgotten that "going forth" is the necessary prerequisite to "bringing in." The sower must go forth bearing the precious seed if he would come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. The followers of Christ must go out into the highways and hedges or else they will never constrain the wanderers to come in. Whenever this fact has been overlooked the church has suffered from drought and barrenness. The "dark ages" were the sad result of a long-continued stay-at-home policy. The immense increase of the church during the present century is due to the fact that a hundred years ago William Carey—"the consecrated cobbler"—and kindred spirits revived the missionary idea. In our common vernacular the word "go" stands for energy, enterprise, far-reaching endeavor. More "go" is still needed in the church. We congratulate ourselves because we have missionary "boards" and "societies" and "circles;" but the best results will never be reached until the church shall herself become a great missionary organization, not working centripetally in a mere struggle for local existence, but going, going always and everywhere, to carry the gospel to the "lapsed" and the "unchurched," out into the highways, to our national frontiers, to all such as lie in darkness and the shadow of death.

2. "*Go, preach.*" In the economy of the kingdom it has pleased God to ordain that men should be saved by "the foolishness of preaching." Other things are helpful, but this is the *sine qua non*. The service of song,

the administration of the sacraments, with all litanies and other less essential parts of devotion, are mere adjuncts. The power that saves is the word of God, and the word is set forth in preaching. This is the flashing of that sword of the Spirit by which the world is ultimately to be subjugated to Christ.

The word "preach" is in the original *Eu-angellein*, meaning to bring glad tidings. The word "gospel" is from the Saxon *gōd-spel*, meaning good news. To "preach the gospel" is therefore, by tautological emphasis, to carry the best message that ever fell upon the ears of the children of men; to wit, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The substance of preaching is set forth variously. (1) Preach the gospel (Rev. 14:6). This is to come like a herald to a beleaguered city with news of deliverance. (2) Preach the kingdom (Luke 9:60). This is to declare the downfall of Satan's empire and the beginning of Messiah's reign, the consummation of which is to be "the restitution of all things" in the golden age of truth and goodness. (3) Preach the word (2 Tim. 4:2). The word of God covers the whole province of (*a*) sin (*b*) grace, (*c*) justification by faith, (*d*) conduct, (*e*) holy service, and (*f*) the endless life. "The word" furnishes the preacher a boundless realm. It touches human life at every point in its circumference. It is like the air, which rests upon us with a pressure equal to fifteen pounds to the square inch. The word touches a man's home life, his business, his politics, and all his relations with the world around him. (4) Preach Christ (1 Cor. 1:22-24). Christ is the starting-point and terminus of all. Ten

thousand themes are proper in the pulpit, but all must centre in him, as all the tents of Israel looked towards the sanctuary and the pillar of cloud above it. "Christ first, Christ last, Christ midst, Christ all in all.

3. "*Go, heal the sick.*" The original twelve were endowed with special gifts or *charismata* for miracles of healing. In many of these miracles they anointed with oil (Mark 6: 13; also Jas. 5: 14). This practice still survives in the "extreme unction" of the Roman-catholic Church, which, strangely enough, is administered not for healing but as a preparation for death. The peculiar gifts which were bestowed upon the twelve were for the special needs of the infant Church, and they ceased with the necessity for them.

No doubt diseases are still cured in answer to prayer. The prayer which is offered in a filial spirit is always answered. "Ask, and ye shall receive, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The word is not *may*, but "shall." Let it be remembered, however, that a filial prayer is always made with due regard to the Father's superior wisdom, its corollary being, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." If sickness is better for a man than health, as is oftentimes the case (Heb. 12: 11), then his prayer, if it be the true prayer of faith, must needs be adjusted to it.

But if ministers and other Christians are no longer able to work miracles they have still the blessed power of healing diseases which go deeper than the flesh: of opening the eyes of the spiritually blind, of casting out veritable demons of lust and avarice, and raising such as are dead in trespasses and sins. And this, indeed, was the supreme purpose of all those apostolic gifts. Is there anything better under the sun than to lift the burdens of

the sorrowing, to sweeten the lives of the lonely and friendless, and to open heaven's gate to such as are without God and without hope in the world?

In the impartation of these *charismata* the Master, with reference to their proper use, added the injunction, "Freely ye have received, freely give." They were not to be employed for the fostering of spiritual pride, but to be dispensed for the common good. The grace of giving is everywhere in Scripture as it pervaded the Master's life. He gave himself for us. The way to catch his spirit is to begin, as did the Christians of the Macedonian church (2 Cor. 8: 5), by first of all giving our own selves unto the Lord. Then will follow the communication of our spiritual gifts to others, whatever they may be. Our time, treasure, faculties of soul and body, joys and triumphs, will all be shared with those about us. And in giving we shall grow rich, as athletes grow strong by exercise. Bunyan says:

"A man there was, and people called him mad,  
The more he gave away the more he had."

This is preëminently true of our moral endowments. The power to heal, to exorcise, to quicken the dead is enlarged as we use it. As the windlass turns above, the waters of the well beneath grow cool and clear.

4. *Go, trust.* The Lord was sending these disciples out into a wicked and gainsaying world—as sheep into the midst of wolves—in which their sole reliance would be faith in God. They were enjoined to take neither gold nor scrip for their journey, to provide nothing beyond what the day required, not even two pairs of shoes, nor a change of tunics, nor a staff beyond that already in hand. The Lord would provide; let them depend upon that.

In those days the wants of the disciples were few and simple, and the hospitable customs of the Orient made it an easy matter to find food and shelter. There are occasions even now when it devolves upon an evangelist or missionary to go forth light-shod and unburdened, like a soldier on the march, trusting wholly in Providence from day to day. But the conditions of life are so changed that, as a rule, to proceed in such a manner would be to break the spirit of Christ's injunction while keeping the letter of it.

At the same time, there is reason to doubt whether the church with her vast increase of wealth and patronage has not lost some of the power which goes with the necessity of an utter dependence on the divine care. The father-superior of a monastery, famed for its rich endowment, was heard to remark: "The time has gone by when the church has need to say with Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" "Aye," responded a humble monk at his side, "and the time has also gone by when the church can say to the cripple: 'Arise, and stand upon thy feet!'"

Faith is the measure of spiritual power. To feel one's dependence upon God is to be clothed with might. "I will glory in my infirmities," said Paul, "that the power of Christ may rest upon me;" and again, "I take pleasure in infirmities; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

On entering a village these primitive disciples were not to go about from house to house, accepting entertainment at random: but rather to inquire for "one who was worthy," for one of those who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and to abide there. Out of this wise provision grew up "the church in the house," which was the nucleus of the local church and congregation. Thus



the very poverty of these itinerants was their strength, and their necessity was the seed of the church's future. They went forth trusting and obeying, and God honored their faith.

5. *Go upon an errand of life or death.* The gospel has in it both saviors. It falls like the rain from above, a boon to the thirsty but a vehicle for the lightning as well.

"And when ye come into a house," said the Lord, "salute it." The greeting of the time was "Shalom," "Peace be unto you." The house is truly blessed that has the benediction of the gospel upon it.

"And whosoever shall not receive you, when ye depart shake off the dust of your feet." This was a testimony against the unbelieving and impenitent, but it was in no sense a malediction. It was intended to set forth symbolically the loosing of the disciples from all responsibility for the doom of those who stubbornly refused to receive the truth; as if they said, "We came with the message of life, and ye closed your doors against it. We leave you to yourselves. Our skirts are free from your blood. Farewell." What more could they do?

Thus the disciples went forth on their first missionary journey; twelve humble men, unlettered and unbefriended, setting out to the conquest of the world! They were "hated of all men" and "persecuted from city to city," but the Lord was with them. One by one they were called to face the axe or fagot; but their dust, scattered by the winds of heaven, became a militant host. At the end of the first century there were 500,000 Christians; at the end of the second, a million; at the end of the fifth, ten millions; at the end of the tenth, fifty millions; at the end of the fifteenth, a hundred millions; at the end of the eighteenth, two hundred millions; and now, with

the last decade of the nineteenth century still before us, there are upwards of four hundred millions of people on earth who acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ. What hath God wrought! And still the work goes on. To-morrow shall be better than to-day. In humble faith the missionaries of the cross go forth, bearing the banner of Immanuel, conquering and to conquer. From his high place in heaven he who marshalled the nucleus of the army and planned their campaign is superintending and directing all. Reverses there may be, but defeat never. In the beginning it was said, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Christ "asked" with his hands outstretched upon the cross. Never was a prayer like that; never an answer such as we behold in the ingathering of the nations from day to day.

## THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

ISA. 9: 2-7.

IT was a time of trouble. Israel was hastening on toward the captivity. In vain had been all counsels and admonitions. With nations as with men, to sow the wind is to reap the whirlwind. Over and over again the Lord had lit the beacon, "If ye seek me I will be found of you, but if ye forsake me I will cast you off." Still the high places smoked with the sacrifices of Baal, and the people kissed their hands to the winged horses of the sun. God is not mocked. His mills grind slow, but they grind sure. Yet would he leave nothing undone to avert the impending woe. Isaiah the son of Amoz was commissioned to cry aloud and spare not. He stood in the temple porch and denounced the sins of rulers and people. In burning words he urged them to repentance: "Why should ye be stricken any more? The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers." In successive visions he portrayed the horrors of the approaching doom.

(1) He affixed to one of the great pillars of the temple a tablet on which was inscribed "Maher-shalal-hash-baz;" that is, "Hasting to the spoil and speeding to the prey" (Is. 8, 1-4).

(2) He spoke of a river, strong and great, overflowing its banks and sweeping all before it. They had refused "the waters of Shiloah that go softly:" and now,

behold, the glory of Assyria should fill the breadth of the land (Is. 8: 5-8).

(3) "I see," he cried, "a vision of battle! Gird yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; take counsel and it shall be brought to nought." Amid the strife is heard the muttering of such as seek unto wizards and familiar spirits. There are cries of the wounded and garments rolled in blood; the multitudes fleeing, stumbling, hard bestead and hungry, cursing their king and their God (Is. 8: 9-22).

(4) Then darkness, dimness of anguish; the stars fading into an unbroken night, in which are heard the clanking of chains and sorrow "by the way of the sea beyond Jordan" (Is. 9: 1).

(5) In the darkness a star shines forth. Those that dwell in the shadow of death behold it. Hope revives; songs are heard "according to the joy of harvest and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." The rod of the oppressor is broken, and deliverance is wrought as with "burning and fuel of fire." Messiah has come! (Is. 9: 2-8.)

Louder and louder since then has swelled the song of welcome. The glimmer of the morning star has brightened to a noontide splendor. The rejoicing of those who touched their harps by the rivers of Babylon is drowned in the Christmas chimes. The Lord hath turned again and again the captivity of Zion. Old and young, the world over, in ever increasing multitudes unite in the advent joy.

"Ring out, O bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light!  
Ring out, wild bells!  
Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring out the false, ring in the true;

“Ring in the valiant men and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be !”

The star out of Jacob, the herald of the Christ-child, has awakened the race to newness of life. Our “Merry Christmas” with its songs, and twinkling lights, and sanctuary praises, gives token that “the people have seen the great light.” Let us, in the midst of our festivities, hearken to the bells that Isaiah heard aforetime, the sweetest Christmas chimes that ever rang; five clear notes of the advent, pealing through the deep darkness before the dawn and seeming to say,

“To us a Child of hope is born,  
To us a Son is given;  
Him shall the sons of earth adore,  
Him all the hosts of heaven !”

*First bell:* “His name shall be called Wonderful.” Here, at the very threshold of the gospel, we come upon mystery. Ours is a religion of mysteries, of which Christ himself is greatest of all. Whoever refuses to accept the supernatural or to believe in the supernatural must pause at the manger. He can go no further. For great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in flesh; the angels desire to look into it.

In Lerolles' famous picture of the nativity a group of rustics are gathered about the stable-door, all a-tiptoe and agape, gazing through the dim shadows at the mother and her child. And, indeed, in presence of this birth-miracle we are all rustics. Philosophers know no more than “daft Jamie” about the incarnation. Wisdom cries, “Impossible!” Faith marvels and believes.

How Godhood and manhood could be knit together

in the person of the Christ is beyond us. But things which are incomprehensible are not on that account incredible. There are marvels enough in a drop of water or a grass-blade to bewilder the wisest. All divine works are wonderful. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." Daniel Webster said: "If I might comprehend Christ I could not believe in him. He would then be no greater than myself. Such is my consciousness of sin and inability that I must have a superhuman Saviour, a Saviour far beyond me."

But the wonder does not cease at Christ's manger. He was no more mysterious in his person than in his character. He was the unique, perfect, unapproachable man. Of all that ever lived on earth he alone was without sin. Who could lay anything to his charge? Judas paid tribute to his sinlessness, saying, "I have betrayed innocent blood." Herod said, "Behold the man! I find no fault in him at all." The centurion who had charge of the crucifixion was forced to confess, "Certainly this was a righteous man." In him alone we behold the ideal of character. The best of living men is the one who most nearly copies his graces and reproduces his manner of life.

His life was spent in labors of love; as it is written, "He went about doing good."

"Where'er he went affliction fled  
And sickness raised her drooping head."

In pursuance of his mission he set his face steadfastly towards the cross. Here the wonder culminates. Never was birth like his, never life like his, never death like his. He had come forth as a knight-errant to deliver the race. He met Maher-shalal-hash-baz on Calvary and despoiled

him there. In his death-travail he conquered death and brought life and immortality to light. The earth trembled, the heavens were shrouded in gloom; the very angels leaned upon their harps in silence waiting for the cry of the victor, "It is finished!" Then the chains of Israel's captivity were broken, and ever since the gates of heaven have been thronged with such as return to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. Well might the infidel Rousseau exclaim while gazing at the cross: "Socrates died like a man, but Jesus like a god!"

*Second bell:* "His name shall be called Counsellor." The world needs guidance, not more in the dark night of Isaiah's vision than to-day and always. "What is truth?" we all inquire. Jesus answers, "I am the truth." We are all the while confronting great problems which we cannot solve. We need a teacher, one who shall teach not as the scribes—with hair-splitting finesse and unfathomable profundity—but with authority. At the baptism of Jesus a voice from heaven was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." We want to know about sin and its attendant penalty. "Hear ye him!" We want to know about the possibility of pardon; is there an eye to pity or an arm to save? "Hear ye him." We want to know the precepts of right living, for we are ever bewildered at the cross roads. "Hear ye him." Our eyes are blinded with tears and our hearts are nigh to breaking with sorrow; oh! is there balm in Gilead? "Hear ye him." We are troubled with a certain looking for of judgment and would fain be told how a man can be just and stand untrembling before God. "Hear ye him." There is no problem of the spiritual life which he does not touch with a resolving hand, no question of the soul which he does not answer in words of peace like the soft

waters of Siloa's brook. Wonderful teacher ! Even his foes confessed the strange power of his doctrine. A Roman guard was sent to seize him as he was preaching in the temple porch ; they listened, were amazed, and returned empty-handed, saying, " Never man spake like this man !"

*Third bell* : " His name shall be called The Mighty God." Hear the chimes ring forth a deep, majestic stroke. This was the sign which the Lord himself had given : " Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call his name Immanuel," that is, God with us (Isa. 7 : 14).

To enter upon an argument as to Christ's divinity would ill become our purpose here and now. The truth is interwoven with all Scripture and shines forth everywhere between its lines. The merry-making of the Christmas tide, which overspreads the world like sunshine, is the token of an ever-growing conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is " very God of very God." Was he not called by a divine name ? Did he not arrogate to himself all the divine attributes ? Did he not permit his disciples to render him divine homage ? as when Thomas cried, " My Lord and my God !" But at this joyous season, when the air is full of hosannas, we have little patience with the threshing of old logic. We feel that Christ is God. The night has flown with sable wings before the rising of his glory. Why frame an argument as to the power of light when the sun " flames in the forehead of the morning sky," when all the forests are resonant with song, and all the meadows glistening with dew ?

It is indeed difficult to realize that the feet of Jesus, so often weary in earthly journeyings, were the same that of old had " walked in the circuit of heaven ;" that his



hands, pierced on the cross, were the same that framed the worlds and spun them out upon their orbits; that his face, oftentimes covered with the sweat of honest toil, was the same that John saw in his vision, glorious "as the sun shineth in his strength." But so the bell chimes forth, and our hearts respond, "This is he, the mighty to save!" Wonderful? Aye, but glorious beyond all words to tell. This Jesus is the God that thundereth and the God of our salvation.

*Fourth bell:* "His name shall be called The Everlasting Father;" literally, the Father of Eternity. Our Lord Jesus came to reveal the Father. To know him was the desire of all devout minds. But it was impossible to behold him. An old-time philosopher who gazed at the sun was long blinded to everything else. The blazing orb had so fixed itself upon the retina of the eyes that whenever he looked upward or downward, with eyes open or shut, he saw nothing but the sun. Still more disastrous would it be for a finite man to gaze at Deity. "No man can see God and live." But in Jesus Christ the divine glory is tempered to our weakness. We see God through the medium of flesh. Philip saith unto Jesus, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us." And Jesus answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. How sayest thou, then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me?"

Here is mystery, doubtless; the mystery of the triune God; but however it may be beyond the possibility of critical analysis it contravenes no law of thought, and there is inexpressible comfort in believing it. When President Lincoln was busied with the affairs of state, so

occupied that prime-ministers and secretaries were kept waiting at his door, there was one voice, that of his little son, which could remove all barriers and win a hearing always. Thus Jesus, the well-beloved Son of the Father, has access to the throne in our behalf; and by reason of his strange filial relation we also are received in the spirit of adoption, whereby we say "Abba, Father."

*Fifth bell.* "His name shall be called The Prince of Peace." Names name him not; yet is there none sweeter than Shiloh. It is cognate with the greeting "Shalom," that is, Peace be unto you. It characterizes Christ as the great reconciler. (1) He makes peace between man and God. With one hand in that of the Infinite and the other grasping that of the sinner he brings them together in a blessed at-one-ment; as it written, "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh, through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in the sight of God" (Col. 1: 21, 22). (2) He makes peace also between man and his own conscience. For we are ever at conflict with ourselves, our higher and lower natures struggling like wrestlers for the mastery. The evil that we would not, that we do, and the good we would we do not; and conscience is kept busy accusing or else excusing; and seldom does a man lie down at night without the feeling that he has been his own enemy. It is Jesus alone who can draw the sting of a guilty conscience and replace the inward unrest with a blessed sense of right doing. "Peace I leave with you," he said, "my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you; let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (3) He finally makes peace between man and his fellow man. The evil spirits of envy and jealousy flee

at his presence. The Golden Rule breaks down the barriers of caste and enables men to see each other face to face and eye to eye as children of the same Father. The gates of the temple of Janus were shut when Jesus was born. It was a prophecy of the time when the swords of the nations shall be beaten into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, and when the great angel shall fly through heaven proclaiming, "All the earth is at rest!" Then the kingdom shall be given to Shiloh, Prince of Peace, and he shall reign forever and ever.

It is recorded that when Agamemnon sailed against Troy he arranged that, in case the city was taken, intelligence should be brought to his wife Clytemnestra by a chain of signal-fires. Time passed and no news came. Ten years were gone and still her guards kept watch upon the palace-roof. But at last they saw the flashing of the distant beacons, leaping from mountain to mountain, nearer and nearer, telling of the fall of Troy. Thus do we wait for Shiloh's triumph. The lights are kindled far away. The joy of each returning Christmas-tide is like the firing of a beacon on a nearer hill. One bright day we shall hear again the song that awoke the echoes among the Judean hills: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!" Then all the bells of heaven and all earth's chimes will ring together.

"Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring out the false, ring in the true!  
Ring out old shapes of foul disease,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace!  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be!"



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